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THIS BOOK WILL BE TAKEN BACK
SURE BY

OR, The Octopus League of New York.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH,
AUTHOR OF "FELIX FOX," "TEXAS TRUMP,"
"PHIL FLASH," "CITY SLEUTHS,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE MANACLED WRIST.

In one of the nooks of Union Square not penetrated by the electric light, a man occupied a settee alone.

He had come directly to it from the busy streets beyond, as if he knew just where to find it, and when he had seated himself he lighted a cigar and began to smoke.

It was one of the rarest nights of the past summer, and the park was filled with strollers and loungers of both sexes. In the shadows of

"No!" EXCLAIMED THE BOY. "YOU ARE TO WALK THE STREETS OF NEW YORK
FEARLESS IN THE LIGHT OF DAY."

the trees the settees were occupied by young people with a single exception, and this was the one where the silent smoker sat alone—shunned, as it seemed, by everybody.

If any person had noticed him particularly, it would have been seen that he did not display his right hand, and that the sleeve on that side was pulled well down.

And if the inspector could have raised the sleeve, he would have seen a band of steel about the wrist.

It was a broken manacle!

Whether the man had but recently escaped from justice or not, he did not look much like a hunted person, nor did he try to avoid the looks people cast at him as they strolled by.

He might have been fifty, though the pair of dark eyes that shone in his head possessed the gleams of youth. His face was covered with a short beard, and his clothes were good, though they had seen a good deal of service.

With his left arm thrown carelessly over the back of the park settee, and the right one hanging at his side with the band out of sight, the man enjoyed his cigar and watched.

His eyes were constantly on the alert.

He did not seem to notice the people who came along, but for all his apparent indifference toward them, he saw every one with a hawk's vision.

Once when a policeman came by he started slightly, and his right arm seemed to hug his side closer without effort, but it was only for a moment, for the night-watch was soon out of sight.

"Why don't he come?" muttered the man at last. "He said he would be here by nine o'clock, and it has just struck. I put dependence in him, and he knows it. He must not fail me."

At that moment a boy came along—a boy about seventeen, with a good physique and a handsome face. His eyes were black like the man's, and his step was quick and airy.

"Ah! on time!" ejaculated the occupant of the settee as he caught sight of the boy, and the next moment the lad was at his side.

"What kept you?" asked the man.

"It is just nine."

"It struck three minutes ago, and three minutes are three years to me, you know."

The boy smiled in the speaker's face.

"Well, never mind that," laughed the smoker. "You are here, and that is good. What have you to report?"

"Not much."

"Have you seen Olive?"

"Not since yesterday."

"And the Octopus—what of it?"

"Oh!" cried the boy, clinching his hands, "it is still at work."

"It will always be at work," exclaimed the man, bitterly. "It will suck the blood of new victims while the old ones remain powerless. Here! touch my wrist, boy," and the man lifted his right hand. "Ah! that is the manacle of crime; that steel band is the one the law put on at the back of the Octopus, the most villainous league that ever cursed any city. I steal from my hiding-place to meet you here. I dare not stand in the lamplight three minutes. I dare not go back to my own—you know why. And all the while the Octopus goes on. The police are powerless; the Mulberry street detectives look for me, the League's victim, while they continue to let the League draw in its victims. Is this never to end? Am I to die in the dark, driven to death with this manacle at my wrist?"

"No!" exclaimed the boy. "You are to walk the streets of New York fearless in the light of day."

"Ah, Ben, that is good prophecy, but I fear it can never be fulfilled."

The boy flushed to the temples.

"I thought you were going to trust me," he half-rebuked.

"So I am! so I am!" was the answer; "but I get impatient. I want to be a man once more. I want to see the Octopus broken up. When will you report again?"

"To-morrow night."

"Here, of course, if the weather is good; if it is not, at my den. Remember."

"I will not forget."

"Be swift, be careful! More than life is at stake. You have all the qualities of a good detective, boy. And then you have a personal interest in this deep, dark puzzle of the mighty city."

"I never forget that," averred the boy. "My life is devoted to this case. I have sworn it against the Octopus, whose hand I felt years ago, for I believe that it was the Octopus League that branded me on the shoulder."

A strange smile came to the man's countenance.

"Ah! who knows!" he exclaimed.

All at once he sprang to his feet and appeared about to break away like a startled stag.

"To-morrow night! remember!" he said in a low tone; then he touched the boy's hand and walked away.

Ben not only watched the man, but followed him beyond the limits of the Square.

He saw that he avoided the light as much as possible and that when he struck Fourth avenue he kept in the shadow of the buildings till he turned into the Bowery.

All the time the boy was at his heels, and although the man walked rapidly through the Bowery with its motley crowds, the young sleuth kept him in sight until he turned into a by-street which was almost dark.

Even here the boy ferret did not leave the man, but continued to track him until he darted down into a basement door and suddenly disappeared.

The man with the manacle was at home again!

Then Ben turned back with a satisfied smile on his lips.

"I don't wonder that he gets impatient!" mused the lad. "I wonder that he submits as he does: but there are the courts—and the merciless judges! He has been through the mill and has a horror of it. He knows that the Octopus of New York has fastened its infamous suckers on his life, and he fears its power. And I am expected to break it up!—I, a boy who was branded in the cradle, by the chief of some league! I don't know what I can do till I try!" and the boy laughed as he darted across the street.

"Hello! my young Bedouin!" exclaimed a voice as Ben struck the sidewalk again. "Fish me a match from your pocket. I want a light!"

The boy looked up and found himself face to face with a man of thirty, tall, well dressed and handsome, though rather dandyish in appearance.

He was holding an unlighted cigar between his fingers while he waited for the match he had demanded.

"I know you, Mr. Joe Jolly!" mentally exclaimed Ben as he furnished the match. "So a part of the Octopus is out airing itself, eh? What fetches you down the Bowery at this hour? I'd like to know. New kids on, too! Oh, my fine rascal! I'd like to walk you into Captain Williams's presence and astonish him with a recital of your deeds! The time will come, though, or I'm not Branded Ben!"

In the mean time the man, Joe Jolly, had lighted his cigar, and handed Ben a quarter for the favor he had extended.

The young night ferret did not hesitate to accept the piece, and the next moment the dandy was walking away.

"I wonder what hard work earned this quarter?" queried Ben, as he slipped the coin into his pocket. "You're very liberal with your wealth, Joe Jolly! You've seen the time when a quarter looked as big as the clock in City Hall Square; but now in patent-leathers and kids!—Oh! what a time you are having!"

It seemed that Ben could not resist the temptation to follow the man he had run across so unexpectedly, and before Mr. Joe Jolly had passed out of sight, the ferret was at his heels.

If the man had any particular destination in view, he did not show any haste, for he strolled leisurely along, much to Branded Ben's disgust.

All at once the boy lost sight of Joe Jolly for a minute, and when he saw him again, lo! he had a companion, and not a chance acquaintance either.

An ejaculation of mingled pleasure and surprise escaped the boy's lips.

"I didn't think you'd meet Major Bullion here, Joseph; but I'm ready to encounter any kind of surprises," laughed the Night Ferret. "What! are you going into Baby Bell's place for a talk? It's all in the Octopus family. Walk right in!"

The two men, watched by the boy, turned toward the open door of one of the concert saloons that infest the Bowery, and went in.

The next instant the young shadower had followed them.

A thick cloud of cigar smoke hung above the seats and tables of the place, and almost obscured the stage at one end of the room.

Joe Jolly and his friend, who was a fine-looking middle-aged man with a full face and a heavy mustache, dropped upon a couple of chairs at one of the tables, while the boy slid into a seat near by, half-hidden by the table.

"Well, Joseph, no clew yet?" began the big man.

"No; but he is in the city."

"I'd like to have proof," was the reply. "If he is here he is in hiding; he dare not show his head above the surface. The girl knows nothing about him, but you have that matter in your hands."

Joe Jolly smiled, and threatened to break into a laugh.

"She don't tell me every thing, you know!" he protested.

"No, but you ought to know something. When did you see her?"

"Night before last."

"Well?"

"She told me that she had seen enough of Joseph Jolly."

"No! You went a little too fast!" exclaimed Major Bullion with a frown. "But now about the other scheme. The plans are completed, and the Octopus—"

At this moment Ben heard a step behind him and the next minute a heavy hand dropped upon his shoulder.

"See here! You're eavesdropping! We don't allow it! Get out!" and the hand of the speaker lifted him out of the chair.

The next moment the boy was on the sidewalk, ejected by Baby Bell, the proprietor of the place.

CHAPTER II.

HARD TO BEAT.

"THAT'S a sudden discharge!" exclaimed Branded Ben when he got his breath on the sidewalk in front of the concert hall.

His ejection had been performed without ceremony, and he seemed to feel the impress of Baby Bell's fingers in his flesh.

"Baby" Bell was a sarcastic misnomer, for its possessor was a veritable giant, with hands like a pugilist's, and with a strength like a lion's. He attended in person to all disturbances in his place, and his frequent interference had had a quieting effect. Nobody wanted Baby Bell to lay hands on them, for very often those hands were clinched and "ugly."

Branded Ben, the boy ferret, had been carried from the place almost before he knew what was up, and the giant proprietor had left him on the sidewalk without a word.

In the house the boy heard the orchestra in one of its wildest flights, and now and then an outburst of laughter from one of the patrons; but he knew better than to tempt the anger of Baby Bell by going back.

He wondered if Major Bullion and Joe Jolly had resumed their conversation which had just reached a very important point for him when the ejection took place.

Fortunately for Ben's feelings nobody of any consequence had witnessed his misfortune. Two or three street loafers were hanging around in front of the "hall" when the boy came out in the grip of Baby Bell; and they laughed at the sight; but Ben did not care for them.

He wanted to see what became of the two confederates inside, but, above all, he wanted to hear something about that new scheme which Major Bullion intended to unfold. Unfortunately there was no way for him to attain his desires.

"We'll get even for your freshness, Baby Bell!" decided Ben, as he walked down the street a few paces and then halted. "The Octopus is having a night session in your establishment, and you have seen fit to protect it. One of these days, my Bowery giant, I'll recall this little incident, and to your displeasure."

For more than an hour the boy detective occupied a rather secluded spot on the sidewalk and watched the entrance to Baby Bell's place.

He saw everybody who came in and went out in that time; but neither Major Bullion nor Joe Jolly appeared.

Was it possible that the two men had remained so long?

"Hello! what are you piping now?" suddenly cried a voice at the boy's elbow, and he turned to see the good-humored countenance and sparkling eyes of a boy of his own size.

Ben gave utterance to an exclamation of pleasure.

"Have you ever been fired out of Baby Bell's?" he asked, clutching the youth's arm.

"Never."

"Well, I have, and just awhile ago too. I came out like a ramrod fired from a cannon, and all because I was listening to a little conversation between two men."

"Ho! nothing more?" laughed Ben's companion.

The young detective shook his head.

"Dick," he went on, "I want some information from the seat of war. I want to know whether the elegant Joe Jolly, or another man called Major Bullion, though that is not his name, is in there. You know Joseph?"

"You bet I do!" was the answer.

"But not the major?"

"Not the major, or not by that handle."

"Well, he is a big man with a pompous mustache which does him honor," smiled Ben. "If Joe Jolly is in there, the major isn't far away. Go in and see."

The young detective's spy moved away with eagerness, and Branded Ben began to wait for his reappearance.

"Not in there," suddenly reported the spy at the end of five minutes. "Baby Bell even isn't on hand."

The Night Ferret started.

"They didn't come out by the front door!" he declared.

"Not if they thought you were on the watch. They are not in Baby Bell's place, and I heard the man in charge tell one of the proprietor's special friends that he would not be back again to-night."

"The Octopus is spreading its feelers!" the young detective decided at once, and having thanked his friend for his help, he turned his back to Baby Bell's establishment and walked away.

"I'll make another effort to find them!" he resolved. "Something cunning is in the wind. I haven't been on the trail of the Octopus League all these weeks for nothing. I know a few things pretty well. I have discovered one of the monster's feeding-grounds."

The next moment Ben was walking rapidly down the Bowery. He kept on till he reached Broome street, where he turned west and proceeded to Baxter.

"I'm getting quite near!" he smiled to himself. "Aha! my fine lot! if you thought that Branded Ben could not find one of your haunts, you have deceived yourselves."

Five minutes later the boy ferret darted into a dark alley and glided along a wall almost as noiseless as a cat.

He could barely see his hand before his face, but after awhile he reached the light of a gas-jet that burned in a globe above a door.

Almost directly opposite the light was a door sunk in the wall of a brick house that did not seem to be inhabited.

Ben knocked three times on this door near the bottom of it, and shortly afterward it was opened, and he bounded in.

The door had apparently opened without human help, for nobody greeted the caller.

He was in a short hallway at the end of which a lamp occupied a bracket, and proceeding to it the boy detective found another door, which he opened.

"It is me, Mordecai," he announced, approaching a man who sat at a little bench with his eyes shaded, and under them the peculiar features of the Jew.

The man was very old, but his eyes, deeply sunken and dark, were very bright. The workbench before him was covered with small steel tools of every description, and others, nippers and the like, were arranged along the wall back of the bench.

Ben knew that the strange force which had opened the front door was operated by a little steel bar under the old Jew's feet.

"Vell, vat is it, mine fr'ent?" asked Mordecai—"Prince" Mordecai he was called by certain people—as he turned the battery of his peculiar eyes upon the boy who stood beside him.

"I want to know if certain people are at home," answered Ben.

The old man started and then laid down the elegant diamond cluster pin he was working on when the boy detective came in.

"Vat you wants to know for, eh?" he exclaimed. "Ef you keeps on you'll spoil all mine peeze-ness."

"But I'll make you richer than they ever can!" was the answer. "Hold on, Mordecai! I don't want to force you to do anything. You can keep your seat if you want to. I guess I can find another way."

"No, mine boy; I was only joking!" cried the old Jew, slipping from the chair. "We vill see ef dey peeze at home shoost now."

Ben could not suppress a smile as he saw the old man shuffle across the room.

Prince Mordecai was one of the strange characters of New York. Long before the opening of our story he had gained a reputation for lapidary work, which had made him famous in a certain way.

Whenever an adroit thief secured a fine pin or

bracelet, which was certain to be recognized on sight, he carried it to Prince Mordecai, who altered it in a manner that render it saleable.

This was the old Jew's trade. He had carried it on in another quarter of New York until the police were about to fasten on him, then he had suddenly disappeared, and was lost as if the waters of the bay had received him in their depths.

It is not our duty just now to inform the reader how Ben formed an acquaintance with the Jew, nor why his knock was the open sesame to the secret and mysterious quarters of the old lapidary.

Branded Ben watched him eagerly whenever he went to the place. The dark little eyes snapped treacherously, and the boy detective sometimes felt uneasy in Prince Mordecai's workshop, but he had a hold on the old fellow which he thought would prevent him from serving him any shabby tricks.

On the present occasion Mordecai seemed disposed to play fair, for he opened a narrow door at one end of the room and signaled Ben with a look to follow him.

They entered a room which was quite dark, but the Jew found a stairway, up which he conducted Ben to a long hall, also without light.

At the end of this hall there was another stair, and in a small room at the head of it a heavy ladder leading to a trap-door in the ceiling.

"Now, mine fr'ent, you shoost wait for Mordecai," remarked the Jew, and Ben saw him mount the ladder with the agility of a young man.

He disappeared in the hall above, but at the end of a few minutes he came back with spiderwebs clinging in long filmy threads to his clothes.

"Dey peze at home," announced the Jew with a twinkle in his eyes.

"How many?" asked Branded Ben.

Prince Mordecai held up three fingers slightly separated.

The boy detective leaned against the wall and drew his shoes.

"You can go back to the bench," he remarked to the Jew. "I am able to attend to this little business."

"You moost not alarm them!" warned Prince Mordecai, grasping Ben's arm.

"I value my life too highly for that!" was the quick response, and slipping from the old man's grasp Branded Ben sprang nimbly up the ladder and disappeared.

Old Mordecai looked at the opening for a moment, and then, with a sinister smile and a shake of the head, turned back to his workshop, two stories below.

The boy Night Ferret found himself in a loft among spider webs and other of the usual features of a place of the kind.

A wide board stretched before him in the darkness, and he crept along it without noise.

The distance seemed endless, but at length Ben halted over a spot which could not have been in the Jew's house.

Beneath him was a streak of light, and the New York ferret stooped and put his eyes to it.

"Aha! I've run them down for all!" he exclaimed. "The Octopus may be shrewd, but some of its haunts are known."

Ben was looking down into a room well-lighted and supplied with several chairs and a table.

The place had three tenants at the time and the boy ferret's eyes snapped as he named them to himself.

Major Bullion, Joe Jolly and Baby Bell!

CHAPTER III.

THE WORKINGS OF A PLOT.

BRANDED BEN had found the trio again.

As he lay at full length on the board in the darkness of the old garret he had the crack in the ceiling directly under his eye, and it was large enough to let him see the whole room below.

After looking awhile he discovered a small box at the side of Major Bullion's chair, and in one corner of the room stood a tinner's portable furnace, in which were a lot of live coals.

"What are these fellows up to now?" ejaculated the boy ferret. "That box and the little furnace mean something. They intend to inaugurate or complete a villainous scheme of some kind. I will see what it is."

The next moment Major Bullion leaned back in his chair and picked up the box.

"I guess we're ready for the work," he exclaimed with a look at Joe Jolly. "You can fetch him in."

The young dandy instantly sprang up and

left the room while Major Bullion leaned toward Baby Bell with his cunning eyes atwinkle.

"This is the best play the Octopus has ever made!" he laughed. "That is, the stakes are the biggest, though it takes some good playing. We've fallen afoul of the right victim. See what nice work I had done!" and he opened the box on the table and took out a singular-looking bit of iron which he fastened on to the end of a little steel rod.

His next move was across the room to the fire in one corner, and Branded Ben saw him thrust the rod and its fixture among the coals.

"I guess I'll have to do the work," he went on, coming back to Baby Bell at the table. "Joe's hands are too tender for this kind of a job. He would flinch just when we want a steady nerve."

Five minutes later Joe Jolly reappeared accompanied by a youth who was a stranger to the watching Ben.

He was good-looking and well-built, and his eyes were bright and expressive.

Major Bullion greeted the boy with an exclamation of pleasure, and shook him cordially by the hand as he came forward.

"You know what you are here for?" asked the major.

The youth nodded.

"We can make you rich if you submit to everything."

"How rich?" asked the boy, eagerly.

The three men smiled at the question.

"Richer than you ever expected to get," was the answer. "We want you to be Ned Nolan no longer. You lose that name to-night."

"Can't I ever claim it again?"

"Perhaps not."

The boy seemed to hesitate, and Ben thought he saw him shrink from the table.

"Oh, yes, some time or other, you can go back to your name," continued the major, with a glance at Joe Jolly and the Baby.

"But as long as you're in our employ you can't be Ned Nolan. We will give you full instructions when we see fit. Are you ready?"

"Yes," responded the boy with more promptitude than the young detective expected.

"Then take off your coat."

A sudden pallor seemed to sweep over the youth's countenance, for his eyes had caught sight of the little furnace where the object at the end of the steel rod was red-hot.

But shutting his teeth hard as if he had resolved to go through with the ordeal, whatever it was, he took off his coat and waited for further orders.

"We have got to mark you in such a manner that it will make you a certain person in the eyes of the law," Major Bullion declared. "In other words, we have to brand you with a hot iron."

The boy started with a light cry which the words seemed to wring from him despite his resolves.

"The pain will be momentary," suggested Baby Bell across the table. "You see, we can't succeed without branding you. Everything depends on the brand."

"Go ahead!"

The boy spoke the two words through his teeth; and Joe Jolly brought the furnace forward.

"You are not going to disfigure me, I hope?" Ned Nolan asked with a smile.

"We wouldn't do that for the world!" laughed Major Bullion. "We are only going to put a little brand between your shoulders. Ah! here we are. Do you want to be blindfolded?"

The boy's figure seemed to straighten an inch.

"No!" he exclaimed, and then he laughed, though his teeth seemed to chatter.

During the next minute Joe Jolly's nimble fingers were occupied in removing the youth's shirt so as to display the fair white skin between his shoulders.

It was a sacrilege to mar it at all, and the boy in the loft, who knew that he was branded for life felt like disturbing the trio with a loud shout.

"Steady, now!" cried Major Bullion, as he took the branding-iron from the fire and motioned to his companions to seize the boy and hold him fast. "We'll be through in a second. I am going at it now."

The next moment the big villain stepped toward the boy whose flesh was at his mercy, and all at once the red-hot iron was thrust forward!

The next second Ned Nolan started forward with a wild cry, which was cut short by Baby Bell's hand at his mouth, and the disgusting odor of burned flesh came up to the unseen witness of the terrible scene!

There was not a vestige of color in the face of

the branded boy; and he hung like a dead person in the hands of the two men.

"It is a splendid job!" ejaculated Major Bullion as he snatched a moistened rag from the box and applied it to the wound. "This little play is worth a cool hundred thousand. Ah! the boy has fainted. Take him back, Joseph. He'll be all right in a few days."

Joe Jolly had to carry the youth from the room, while Major Bullion cooled the branding-iron and made everything snug again.

There was a triumphant look in the man's eyes and he grinned whenever he encountered Baby Bell's gaze.

"Now, if Joe gets on well with the girl, as of course he will, despite the rebuff he talked about to-night, the Octopus will score two victories instead of one!" smiled the major. "By to-morrow night we will have some kind of a report from our sleuth-hound concerning the missing felon. We must find that man, Baby."

The proprietor of the Bowery concert hall nodded assent.

"He is somewhere in the city, for I am certain he came back here, after his escape. Olive does not know anything about him, so Joe says; but he must be found!"

By this time the little box and the furnace had been stored away in a secret cupboard in the wall, and Major Bullion was coming back to the table when Joe Jolly reappeared.

The dandy had something important to communicate; his looks showed this.

"The Lynx is back!" he said with a grin on his face.

"Before his time, too!" added Major Bullion. "Show him in, Joseph!"

Joe Jolly stepped to the door and admitted a man, who took off his hat as he entered the presence of the two rascals at the table.

"You were not required to report till to-morrow night," exclaimed Major Bullion.

A smile instantly covered the visitor's face.

"I can keep my report then," he grinned. "If you don't want it now—"

"Oh, we'll take it any time!" was the interruption.

Ben could not take his eyes from this man called the Lynx.

He did not appear to weigh one hundred pounds; his face was a dirty parchment color devoid of any adornment. His body was slim and without an ounce of surplus flesh upon it.

On the top of his head was a bald spot which glistened like a polished dollar. His eyes, too, had a vivid glitter, and were black and restless. His ears were too large for his head, and, altogether, he was a person calculated to make a beholder smile.

But Ben could see that he was a shrewd person, and his manners told the boy ferret that he had entire control of himself.

When Major Bullion interrupted the Lynx to say that he would take his report at any time, the Lynx advanced a step as he said:

"I have found him!"

"Cephas Corson?" cried Major Bullion.

"Yes, Cephas Corson!"

"Thank the fates! Where did you run across him?"

"In Union Square."

"When?"

"To-night!"

"Go on, Mr. Lynx. Tell us all about it. Ah! we are out of the woods by your work! You have found Cephas Corson! That means liberty and millions to us!"

The Lynx did not stir. He waited quietly till the major concluded his congratulations.

"I found him on a bench in the park," he said. "At first he was alone, but by-and-by he had a companion."

"Who was he?"

"A boy who is sometimes called Branded Ben on Mulberry street."

"A police spy!" exclaimed Major Bullion.

"An independent ferret. Just the kind I want to work against!" and the Lynx smiled.

"Well, we'll leave the boy to you," replied Major Bullion. "Did you follow the man home?"

"I did."

"And you know where he lives?"

"Yes."

"There can be no escape for him now! Of course you cannot be mistaken, Mr. Lynx!"

"I don't see how I could be. He wears a manacle on his right wrist, and I heard him tell the boy enough to settle his identity."

"You were close to him, then?"

"A part of the time I lay in the shrubbery behind the setttee he occupied!"

"Jupiter! your life wouldn't have been worth a fig if he had caught you!" exclaimed Joe.

"But he didn't catch me!" was the quick response.

"When can we get him?" asked Major Bullion seriously.

"At any time! He meets the boy shadow in the park to-morrow night."

"No, he doesn't!" mentally ejaculated Ben.

"To-morrow night, then! This time the law will leave no door ajar for him! By Jove, Mr. Lynx, you deserve to be crowned king of spotters!"

Ten minutes later the room was dark and Ben went back to the ladder.

He had seen and heard enough for one night, and what a revelation it had been!

"Is the Octopus to prove more than my match?" he cried. "Ah! we shall see!"

CHAPTER IV.

JOE JOLLY SCORES A POINT.

ABOUT an hour after the occurrence of these events a young girl who occupied a second floor room on one of the quietest streets that lead off from the Bowery, was summoned to her door by a knock.

Tripping lightly across the room with a smile on her face as if she expected to greet some one who would be welcome, she opened the door to see a man who was already bowing with his hat in his hand.

At once a look of aversion came to the girl's eyes.

"I beg your pardon, Olive," began the man who was our acquaintance, Joe Jolly of the Octopus League. "I can not remain away despite your rather cold words; but this time I am here on a matter of business which may concern you."

The fair creature started slightly and seemed to wonder what kind of business could bring Joe Jolly to her humble lodgings at that hour.

"Walk in," she replied. "But I must say now, Mr. Jolly, that our last conversation cannot be resumed."

A sinister smile played at the corners of the young man's mouth and under the glossy hairs of his dark mustache; and the next moment he had accepted the girl's invitation and was in the room.

In a little while Joe Jolly had taken a chair and crossed his legs.

Olive was not far away, near a neat sewing table, and her manner told him that she was waiting for him to begin the business of which he had spoken.

"By Jove! she gets prettier each time I see her!" mentally ejaculated the dudish rascal. "When she is twenty, she'll be the handsomest woman in New York! She doesn't know what she's worth either, and we'll take care that she shall not till the Octopus is ready to rake in the stakes."

Then Joe Jolly cleared his throat and threw a bland smile toward the girl.

"I happened to stumble upon an advertisement which may refer to you," he began, diving a hand into an inner pocket and fishing up a small memorandum-book. "Indeed, I may say that, after a casual investigation, I believe it does concern you."

The fellow was hunting for something in the book while he spoke, and Olive's eyes were bestowing on him a good deal of attention.

At last he found a slip of paper which had once been a part of a newspaper column, and when he had glanced over it as if to assure himself that it was all right, he leaned forward and handed it to the girl.

The following moment Olive read as follows:

"Olive C— of 211 B— street. Danger threatens your best friend, and good luck awaits you if matters are handled by an experienced person. Do not trust any thing to a boy, but answer this in person, or put it in the hands of a man who is willing to serve you."

The advertisement ended without any address, though the girl could see that it had not been published in that shape.

She looked up at Joe Jolly and found him looking away as if he thought she had not read the bit of paper.

"There is no address," she remarked in a manner that brought the young man back to the subject.

"Ah, no—none now," he exclaimed. "In cutting it from the paper I accidentally ruined the address, but that did not prevent me from doing you a little favor."

"Then you know who sent the 'personal' to the—"

"The *Herald*!" ejaculated Joe. "Yes, I made it a point to see what was in this matter."

"And you found the party?"

Olive unconsciously exhibited an eagerness that made Joe Jolly's eyes sparkle.

"I thought I could put up a brave job!" he exclaimed. "I'm no chump if I do wear kids and smoke five-cent cigars. I've got the fly in the net almost before it has been spread."

"I found the party," he replied to Olive's eager question, and his eyes fell upon the paper still held by the girl. "I must say, Olive, that there is a good deal in it."

"It really means me, then?"

"It was meant for no one else. I did not have to read it twice before a thought flashed across my mind. I determined to get at it as far as I could, but, really, nothing can be done without you being on the ground."

"I cannot guess what this strange advertisement can mean," answered Olive. "I have few friends in New York, and I cannot conceive what danger can threaten any one of them. As for the good luck that awaits me, I am perfectly contented with my present condition."

Joe Jolly threw a half-contemptuous glance around the room; he saw the plain furniture, the second-hand carpet and the sewing-machine which was seldom idle during the day and far into the night.

He could not think how Olive could be satisfied with a lot like hers.

"That is all very well," he said, "but my motto is 'when you can better yourself do it.' I don't think a person ought to neglect his friends. That 'personal' says one of yours is in danger. Don't you want to ward it off?"

"Yes!" exclaimed Olive. "But what did you discover?"

Now was the spider's time.

"I found out just enough to render the whole case very aggravating," he answered. "The advertiser is very cautious. She—"

"A woman, then?" interrupted Olive.

"Yes, and an afflicted one, too! She is compelled to keep her chair by a disease which is slowly taking her to the grave. Were it not for this, instead of inserting this 'personal,' she would have come to you. I told her ere I left, and you will pardon my assurance, Olive, that I was your friend, and that I would, to the best of my ability, represent you in this matter. The lady does not try to be mysterious; she told me in a few words that she will unshrink herself to you."

"Would she not trust a friend whom I might designate to represent me?" asked the girl.

"To an extent which might be embarrassing," was the quick answer. "If you do not wish to do anything at all, I am sorry."

Joe Jolly ceased as if he had nothing more to add, and reaching toward the table, picked up his hat.

"Where is this lady?" inquired Olive.

"Not far off; ten minutes' walk, perhaps; but no time at all for a cab."

The girl hesitated. She did not know anything very bad about Joe Jolly; but she had never admired the fellow since he had tried to force some little attentions upon her. She had seen him sometimes on the street, always well dressed, and always at leisure.

She had often wondered how he managed to live without work, and once when she asked Branded Ben about him, she received a reply that threw but little light on the subject.

A few evenings before the present interview she had told the Bowery dandy that his company too often was not agreeable, but she had not used the plainest of language.

The girl's little home was her world.

The most she knew about the outside had come to her through the boy ferret, who told her a good deal about the different classes of the great city. Her own observations had been limited; and most of these had been confined to the various parks which she had visited on holidays.

"I would like to help you in any manner I can," Joe Jolly suddenly resumed, breaking in upon Olive's hesitation. "I am confident there is a good deal in the 'personal'. The lady wishes to befriend you. She can be reached in a little while if you will take the trouble. I do not insist, for you are your own mistress, Olive."

The girl seemed to decide at the close of Joe Jolly's last sentence.

"I don't like the streets of New York at night," she exclaimed.

"A cab will insure a safe trip," was the response. "I thought you might want to see the lady who takes such an interest in your welfare, therefore I brought a cab with me. I am sure thirty minutes will see you back here wiser in some respects than you are now."

"I will go!" cried Olive, and Joe Jolly watched

her as she opened the door of the little wardrobe and took down a hat.

"It is like finding a bank!" ejaculated the sleek knave, as his eyes sparkled with the victory of villainy. "The Octopus League can congratulate itself on having three of the levellest heads in Gotham. The girl is mine; and the fortune, too!"

Olive was not long preparing to follow the man, and when she turned to him she was ready to depart.

"I must be back here in thirty minutes!" she exclaimed.

"We need not make it that," he replied. "With good horses to jolt us over the streets, we shall accomplish our errand in a short time."

The deluded girl locked the door behind her and put the key in her pocket, then she went down to the sidewalk with the rogue, and he handed her into a cab which stood in the gutter.

A moment afterward away went the vehicle and Olive felt a thrill when she found herself being carried rapidly away.

If a thought of personal danger entered her brain, she did not attempt to retace her steps.

Ah! if she had, she would have discovered that it was too late.

On, on went the cab out of one street and into another; now the gaslight fell upon it, and now it was in the shadow of tall buildings.

The girl began to grow impatient.

Was this the short ride Joe Jolly had promised?

More than ten minutes had elapsed already.

All at once she leaned toward the window of the vehicle and looked out.

At that moment the cab turned a corner and Olive saw the ruins of a once handsome building.

"I am more than a mile from home!" she mentally exclaimed. "That building was on fire when I last went to the park!"

All at once she turned away and looked at Joe Jolly, on the opposite seat.

"We are never going to get there!" she exclaimed.

The sport of the Octopus League broke into a laugh that thrilled the girl.

Like a flash the truth came all at once.

"I am duped," she cried. "There is no lady waiting for me! I demand to be taken back. I will appeal to the driver!"

She darted toward the door of the cab, but a hand quicker than hers caught her and drew her back.

The next moment a damp handkerchief was pressed against her face, and in a little while Olive fell back upon the seat, colorless and apparently dead!

It was another victory for the Octopus

CHAPTER V.

FERRET AND LYNX.

"I HAVE got to be cautious now, for I have the Lynx to contend with! He doesn't look very strong, not much stouter than a match, but he is as quick as a cat, and as cunning as a fox. I saw enough of him last night at the meeting of the Octopus League. He has found the man with the manacle, has even tracked him home, and the League wants to lay its hands on him again!"

Branded Ben talked thus to himself when the day that followed his night of adventure was closing over the great city.

The young Night Ferret had humble quarters not far from Prince Mordecai's retreat; and he had kept pretty close to them during much of the day.

As yet he did not know much about the spotter in the League's employ; he remembered having seen him several times at the ferry-houses, but had never suspected that he belonged to Major Bullion and his companions.

Branded Ben knew that the design of the Octopus League was this:

A fortune valued at one hundred thousand dollars, if not more, was coming to an heir who could not be found. Somehow-or-other the Octopus had learned the conditions of the will that controlled this fortune, and it was now about to substitute a boy for the true heir.

Branded Ben had witnessed a part of the scheme in the burning of the victim; and he knew that when the wound healed the League would present the boy as the heir, and, in all probability, swindle some person out of his rightful legacy.

But this was not the only crime that could be laid upon Major Bullion and his partners—Joe Jolly and Baby Bell.

It was a villainous trio.

Like the great sea-monster whose name the League had taken for its own, it reached everywhere for victims.

More than one sleek night-robbery, more than twenty infamous schemes of different kinds, kept the trio in money.

Baby Bell's Bowery den was a cloak to cover his real profession, and a dozen plots had been hatched there between the three members of the League.

Some years prior to the opening of our story a man was arrested in the vault of a certain bank, which had just been robbed.

The doors of the vault had been blown open, and the man, when found, was half insensible.

He protested his innocence, said that he saw the doors of the bank ajar, it was late at night, and that on approaching them, he was struck by a man and carried into the bank, where he found two men at work on the safe.

It was a plausible story, and the courts might have taken it for truth if the man could have produced evidence of a good name.

This, alas! he could not do.

He had just come to New York; he knew nobody in the city; he refused to give any account of his past life, and to put an end to it all, two men came forward who swore that the man had served a term for burglary in a western penitentiary.

The two witnesses were Major Bullion and Baby Bell.

The prisoner denounced their testimony as infamous; he swore that one of the witnesses was his lifetime enemy; the scene in the court-room was thrilling in the extreme.

Major Bullion's evidence and that of his associate decided the issue.

The prisoner was sentenced to ten years in the penitentiary. He again declared his innocence, and was taken away.

Some years after the trial the Octopus League heard that the man had escaped.

Naturally the gang feared vengeance, for the prisoner's last word in the court-room was a threat of the kind.

It would not do to let him run at large, especially since during his imprisonment the Octopus had made a very important discovery about him.

It was for the purpose of unearthing Cephas Corson that the Lynx was called to the work. Major Bullion had the strange-looking shadower in his power; and he knew that if the Lynx could not find the escaped felon it would be useless to look for him.

If Branded Ben had known that the Lynx was in the employ of the Octopus, he would have devoted much time to the parchment-faced fellow; but he had never caught him with either of the three villains, hence his ignorance of the link that connected them.

The boy ferret had heard enough during his sojourn in the dark loft over the League's quarters to know that Major Bullion intended to entrap Cephas Corson who was the man with the manacle whom we first introduced to the reader in Union Square Park.

The victory was to be won on the night after the Lynx's report, and as its shadows began to steal over the city, Branded Ben slipped from his lodgings ready to oppose his cunning to the League's.

On his way to the basement occupied by the manacled man, Branded Ben concluded to drop in upon Olive, whom he had not seen for several days.

When he arrived at her door he found it locked, and several raps failed to get any response.

"What can have happened here?" mused the Night Ferret. "Olive is never away at this time." He turned the knob and tried the door, but without effect.

"I think the young leddy went away," suddenly spoke a voice behind him, and the boy turned and confronted another sewing-girl who lived in the same building.

"Went away?" cried Ben, leaving the door in an instant. "When did she go?"

"Last night."

"Alone?"

"I don't know. She had a gentleman in her room awhile. He's called several times o' late, I think."

"Was it Joe Jolly?" exclaimed the boy detective, a sudden thought flashing across his mind.

"I don't know, sir."

"How do you know he had called before?"

"I thought I recognized his voice."

"You did not see the man?"

"Not last night, but I have seen him!"

"Well, what is he like?"

"He is a sort of dandy, whom I would never tolerate," was the reply. "He wears kids at all

times as if his hands were too nice to meet the air."

"That is Joe Jolly for a thousand! If Olive went off with that rascal, she is in danger!"

He did not speak the sentence aloud, but the girl might have read it by his countenance.

"Can't I get into Olive's room?" he asked.

The girl glanced up at the transom.

"You might get in that way," she replied.

"I will try!" exclaimed the young detective, and the next minute he was half-way into Olive's room.

The sewing-girl went back to her own quarters, leaving Branded Ben to his own employment.

"If Olive went off with that kidded scoundrel under the influence of some adroit story, she may have left some clew behind," he mentally exclaimed, and in a little while he was searching every nook of the girl's humble room.

"This is a mystery!" he cried when he found himself at the end of the hunt. "What would make Olive run away with Joe Jolly? I never told her much about the fellow; but she did not fancy him! I can't remain here. I must warn Cephas Corson of the descent about to be made upon him by the Octopus. He must not fall into its clutches again! The League knows that he is its sworn enemy, and that he will not rest until the crime of the bank robbery and the perjury have been avenged."

Branded Ben was about to turn to the door when he heard a slight noise like the click of a key in the lock.

The next instant he drew back half-hidden by Olive's bed, and waited.

Somebody was at the door. Was it Joe Jolly, or Olive herself coming back?

The boy ferret did not have to wait long for the door slowly opened, and a figure with cat-like tread slipped into the room.

Ben saw it from the first and his eyes suddenly got a new sparkle when they noticed the visitor creep toward the wardrobe.

"You go to work without any preliminaries," inferred Branded Ben. "There is but one key to Olive's door and you have it in your possession. Of course it came from Olive."

The night-caller was at the wardrobe, and the keen-eyed boy saw him plunge into its dark recesses.

All at once Branded Ben flitted across the room, but his soft footstep was heard, and the person in the wardrobe turned with a light exclamation of surprise. He held a small box in his hand.

"You don't want to show your teeth, Mr. Lynx!" called out Ben, the ferret, as he recognized the intruder who seemed to stand aghast at the sudden discovery. "Why did you come, and not Joe Jolly?"

The person before Ben stepped forward despite the menacing eyes, but he did not relinquish his hold on the little box.

"Who are you?"

"A person whom you don't want to see just now," was the reply. "I know that you are the paid spy of the Octopus, the hired man of Joe Jolly, the kidded sport!"

"Then you know entirely too much, my street hound!" was the quick response, and the next second the Lynx leaped at Branded Ben with all the agility of the animal whose name he bore.

The boy ferret was caught at the throat by the long fallow fingers of the spy, and as he was forced across the carpet, the box which the Lynx held by a handle on the lid descended with crashing force upon his head.

It was an unexpected attack, and one full of fury and vengeance.

The Night Ferret fell back over the bed, and the hand that had gripped his throat relaxed.

"Merciful heavens! how long have I been here?" cried Branded Ben, when he came back to consciousness and started from the bed. "The Lynx is a thunderbolt if he is lean and hungry-looking. Let me see! It is eight o'clock, and the Octopus was to seize Cephas Corson to-night!"

With this cry that sent a thrill through him, Branded Ben sprang toward the door.

He might be too late to save the man with the manacle!

CHAPTER VI.

A NEW MYSTERY.

BEN did not tarry long in Olive's room after he regained consciousness.

The danger that threatened Cephas Corson, the man with the manacle, was enough to make him fly at once to the rescue.

In a little while he was in the vicinity of the

felon's hiding-place and on the lookout for the Octopus League.

During the journey Ben had put on a slight disguise which was sufficient to prevent him from being recognized by any but the keenest eyes.

He found the street as quiet as ever with its many dark nooks and cellar-ways. Here and there he met a pedestrian, but neither of them was Cephas Corson on his way to Union Square for the meeting proposed at the last interview.

Branded Ben crept up the street until he reached the steps that led down into the fugitive's den.

All was still.

Was he too late, or had Cephas Corson gone to the park?

After a moment's inspection of his surroundings with a pair of keen eyes, Branded Ben glided down the steps, and rapped lightly on the felon's door.

There was no response, and then he turned the knob and walked in.

"Cephas, I am here!" ejaculated the boy, in cautious tones.

There was no reply to these words, and Ben went on through the darkness until his hand found another door which he opened.

There were two apartments to Cephas Corson's hiding-place; the front one was his watch-house, the one in the rear his hiding-place.

"Can they have been here?" Ben asked himself, as he stood in the darkness on the threshold of the second room. "It may be that he has fled to the secret place."

The boy shut the door behind him and struck a match. The little flame leaped up from his hand, and revealed the interior of the little apartment.

"What is this?" burst suddenly from Ben's throat, and then he started forward with a wild cry.

"My God! the Octopus has been here!"

A moment later Branded Ben was bending over a human body which lay at the end of the room, and his little light was falling upon the ghastliest sight he had ever beheld!

The dead man—the man was dead—lay on his back, but there were no eyes to stare at the young Night Ferret with that terrible look of the lifeless.

The face was mangled beyond recognition, though there was but little blood on the floor.

All at once the boy's hand darted downward and clutched the corpse's right arm.

"Did they leave the manacle?" he cried.

"Ah, no! they took even that away!"

Branded Ben saw that something, probably an iron band, had been drawn forcibly over the right hand!

His match went out when he made this discovery, and he was alone in the dark with the dead man!

The boy ferret did not strike another match for he had seen enough.

"There must be swift work now!" came through his teeth, as he went back into the other room. "After all his years of waiting for vengeance they have silenced him. It was terribly done, sure enough! The Lynx found the trail for them—the Lynx who invaded Olive's room to-night and gave me a sample of his fury. I will begin the hunt at once."

Branded Ben left the basement and passed up to the street again.

"I don't want to appear in the investigation," he exclaimed. "The police can have the mystery to their satisfaction until I choose to solve it. As I live though, this shall be the noose that strangles the Octopus!"

The young sleuth had never been seen with Cephas Corson in his retreat and the people who occupied the house above the basement did not know him.

"I can begin here," he murmured as he walked up to the door and jerked the bell.

A young girl with a grimace that rather spoiled her looks answered the ring.

She held the door open for the boy to enter; but Branded Ben leaned against the jamb and began.

"Where is the man who lives below you?"

"Isn't he there?" asked the girl.

Branded Ben shook his head.

"Oh, maybe he went away with the gentlemen who called awhile ago."

"Ah! he had visitors, then?"

"Yes."

"How many?"

"Two I think; but Pinkie saw them, she was at the window when they came."

"Call Pinkie."

The girl turned about and sent a shrill cry of "Pinkie!" through the hall, and after a min-

ute a flaxen haired girl of fifteen made her appearance.

"Here, Pinkie; this gentlemen wants to know about the people who called on the man in the box awhile ago. You were at the window, you know?"

"There were two at first, then another came, and when they went away there were four."

"Four!" ejaculated Ben almost taken from his feet by the statement.

"I counted 'em because I thought it so strange for the man in the box to go off with anybody."

"Did he go away?"

"Who else did if four went out when three went in?" cried Pinkie, with a leer.

"You heard no noise?"

"We hear noises enough in our own house."

The boy drew toward the step.

"What were the three men like?" he asked.

"Two were rather large, the other not so much so," was the rather vague description.

"And the man who went off with them?"

"He looked like the man below," was the response.

The boy ferret did not pursue his investigations any further, but gave the girls some coin for their trouble and walked away.

"Three men entered the house, four left it, and yet one remains behind dead!" he ejaculated when he found himself some distance from the place. "What does it all mean?" and then he added, with a smile: "We will let the Mulberry street ferrets try their hands on the case for awhile."

An hour later the police department received through a mysterious source word that a murdered man lay in a certain basement not far from the Bowery.

As usual, the matter was quickly attended to, and the occupants of the frame house above the cellar, the two girls included, were taken off as witnesses.

Nobody knew anything about the murdered man; he had occupied the basement for some time, seldom went out, and then only at night, had no visitors, and was not on terms with any person in the neighborhood.

The girl who had seen the three men enter the basement could give no minute description of them; she was a poor, blundering witness, who was frightened by the stern coroner, the police officers and the crowd.

"Is there anybody in the crowd who thinks he can identify the deceased?" asked the acting coroner, glancing over the little assemblage when the last witness had been examined.

"I think I can, your Honor," said a voice.

"Step forward—this way!" cried the officer, and a good-looking young man edged his way through the crowd.

"Your name, sir?"

"Joseph Jolly."

"Where do you reside?"

"In the city."

"Occupation?"

"Hat-store clerk, out of employment at present."

A smile went around the crowd as our friend Joe Jolly announced his profession as he stood in the middle of the room with his hat held lightly in his gloved hands. If he was a clerk he had not seen service for a long time; the Bowery had known him for several years in succession.

"Very well, Mr. Jolly, proceed and tell us what you know about the deceased," said the master of the inquest.

"His name is Cephas Corson," answered Joe. "Some years ago he was sentenced to ten years imprisonment for burglarizing the Manhattan Bank. Some time ago he escaped, and has eluded the officers ever since."

The coroner glanced at a tall man who nodded slightly, and then signaled to Joe to proceed.

"Of course I know nothing about the man's death," continued the dandy of the Octopus League. "I merely identify him—that is all!"

"How do you know him?" asked the tall man just mentioned.

He was one of the best detectives in New York; Ferdinand Fox they called him.

"Oh, I recognize him by a finger of his left hand which you will see is off at the first joint," was the answer. "Then, a day or two since I saw him in Union Square Park. Some of you may recollect that I appeared as a witness in the Manhattan Bank burglary case when Cephas Corson was convicted."

The detective nodded again and drew back.

"Why didn't you report Cephas Corson's whereabouts to the authorities when you discovered him?" asked the coroner.

Joe Jolly twirled his hat on his kidded hand, and seemed to flush.

"I—I may have thought the man had been

punished enough," he stammered in an admirable manner, with which opinion some of the listeners seemed to agree.

Mr. Joe Jolly was not kept on the witness-stand any longer, and finding that he was not wanted further, he stole from the place and walked away with a very happy smile at the corners of his mouth.

It was evident that he had done an act of which he was proud, and the smile broadened on his face as he hurried from the spot.

"You combine the impudence of Satan with the coolness of a sand-bagger, Joe Jolly!" exclaimed a voice in his rear, and at that moment the speaker put himself quietly on the Bowery sport's trail. "You can swear to anything that promises to assist the Octopus League, so wonderfully elastic is your countenance! I thought one of you would be hanging around the inquest, and that's why I made it a point to be on hand."

Joe Jolly never looked behind him.

Why should he?

He walked away unconscious that a boy who had heard his testimony was at his heels. If he had looked back and seen him, he might have recognized him as the youth whom Baby Bell had ejected from his concert hall for eavesdropping.

The trailer of course was the Night Ferret, Branded Ben.

CHAPTER VII.

BEN IN THE TOILS.

THE young ferret kept at Joe Jolly's heels in hopes that he would give him a clew to Olive's whereabouts.

Branded Ben no longer doubted that his friend, the beautiful sewing-girl, had fallen into a neat trap set for her by the Bowery sport, for the description he had received of her visitor tallied with Joe's appearance.

But Joe Jolly was not disposed to lead Ben to Olive's hiding-place, even if he knew it.

He kept on till he struck the Bowery, into which he turned, and led the young detective a quick pace to the Baby's place of amusement.

Ben paused at the door.

He had not forgotten the treatment he had received at the hands of the proprietor of the place, and he now hesitated about following Joe beyond the forbidden threshold.

Of course he longed to see whom Joe would meet at Baby Bell's after his testimony at the inquest; and he was equally anxious to keep the Bowery dude in sight.

All at once Ben darted away and disappeared down the first street he reached. A few yards from the corner he plunged into an alley and knocked at the door of a low-storied brick house.

It was opened by a middle-aged woman, who uttered an exclamation at sight of him.

"I want to trade clothes with Dick for awhile," explained the young spotter.

"What's up now?" asked the woman, in evident surprise.

"Never mind! Show me to Dick's wardrobe! I'll leave all my wealth in my clothes, so Dick won't be the loser if I never come back."

In a moment Branded Ben was shown into a cramped room and left alone with a lamp.

"Dick's wardrobe consists of one suit of clothes and two pairs of boots," laughed the boy, as he divested himself of his outer garments and got into others which he found at his service. "I don't think Baby Bell's keen eyes will detect me when I am through. The Lynx is not likely to be there, and I will not meet the fellow who gave me the box at Olive's house."

When the boy finished the change and had darkened his eyebrows, he looked quite unlike Branded Ben, and bidding the astonished woman good-night, he went back to Baby Bell's.

"Now for the lion's den again!" he decided, as he opened the door and walked boldly in.

The orchestra was in the midst of a noisy piece, and the room was pretty well filled.

The young shadower walked forward to one of the seats, and composed himself as if he had come to enjoy the performance.

All the time, however, his eyes were on the alert, and they saw and studied everybody in the place.

He saw that the Baby was not at his usual place; but he could not see anything of Joe Jolly.

"The fellow has given me the slip!" ejaculated Ben in tones of disappointment. "Can it be that he caught me on his track, and—"

The branded boy stopped very suddenly, for at that moment a door at the rear of the stage

opened and the smiling face of the Bowery dude made its appearance.

Ben's eyes were on him in an instant.

Joe Jolly was followed by the more portly person of Baby Bell, and a thrill of revenge ran through the boy's frame when he saw the fellow who had collared him from the place a short time before.

The two came down the aisle directly toward Branded Ben, and Joe Jolly dropped into the seat directly behind him.

"By Jove! I laugh about the trick yet whenever I think about it!" cried Joe, looking up into Baby Bell's face.

"It was very neat," was the answer.

"Neat? I should daintily remark!" laughed Joe, taking a cigarette from a rich case. "The major will congratulate me when we meet. It was wholly a scheme of my own. As I have said, Ferdinand Fox was the only person outside of the coroner who put in a remark."

The next moment the Baby was called away and Joe was alone.

"By Jupiter! I was in hot water all the time at the inquest, but I won't confess it!" he said, in audible tones to himself, words which the sharp ears of the boy spotter managed to catch. "There is something about the drama in the cellar which may never be solved, and it puzzles me a great deal. I wonder who the man was?"

Joseph brought his audible meditations to a close as the orchestra finished its play, and during the next few moments he enjoyed his cigarette in silence. Branded Ben from one end of the seat in front stole occasional glances at him, and wondered what he could be thinking about.

"He wonders who the man was?" murmured the young Night Ferret. "What man? He swore at the inquest that the dead man was Cephas Corson, the escaped felon, but now he talks about the mystery of the cellar, and wonders who a certain man was! Aha! Joe Jolly, you are trying to puzzle me again, I see; but if good work can circumvent you and the Octopus, it will be done!"

All at once Baby Bell came to the Bowery dude and tapped him on the shoulder.

Joe Jolly started.

"Ferd Fox was just in here inquiring for you," said the proprietor of the hall.

"The Old Harry!" exclaimed Joe. "What does that detective want with me?"

"Something about your testimony at the inquest mebbe."

"Well, I don't want to see him."

"I thought so."

"And you told him, what?"

"That you weren't here."

"Thanks! Where is he now?"

"He's gone out."

"Then I'll proceed to make myself scarce," ejaculated Joe. "I want time to consult the major, and to get my thoughts together. I want to see Mr. Lynx too. If the major drops in here tell him I'm at—let me see—yes, at Number—West Canal. Ferd Fox will never think of looking there for me!"

A moment later Joe Jolly hastily left his seat and disappeared beyond the narrow door at one end of the stage, and Baby Bell returned to his place behind the counter.

"Number—West Canal! I guess I'm not likely to forget that," exclaimed Branded Ben, as he moved toward the front door a few moments after the Bowery dude's departure. "From some cause or other he doesn't want to meet the detective who heard his testimony at the inquest."

Within the next two minutes the boy detective was on the sidewalk in front of Baby Bell's place, and a smile of satisfaction twinkled in his eyes as he moved away.

"This is one time I didn't feel your claws at my collar, Baby Bell," ejaculated the boy. "I will leave you for the present, and pay my respects a little while longer to the dude of the Octopus."

As for Joe Jolly, he had emerged into an alley in the rear of the concert hall, and was walking rapidly away.

His aim was to reach Canal street as quickly as possible, and in order to prevent recognition, he left the Bowery and turned into a less public thoroughfare. This time he had nobody at his heels, for Branded Ben was not particular about finding him on the street, for he had overheard his destination, and was himself on his way to the designated spot.

To a boy who knows the ins and outs of New York like the young detective, there is always a "short cut," and on this occasion Branded Ben had one at his service.

Darting through several alleys, which mate-

rially shortened the route, the nimble spotter reached Canal street in advance of the Octopus sport.

He at once began to look for the number named by Joe, and found it after a little hunt. It proved to be a two-story brick house with a pawnshop on the first floor, and the door which led into the dwelling part of the building was to the left of the shop.

The pawnshop had been closed for the night, or Branded Ben would have entered it in search of certain information; but as it was, he was compelled to loiter around till Joe should appear.

He had to wait ten minutes for the Bowery sport, and when he heard the peculiar footsteps of his man, he drew back into the shadow of the building and held his breath.

Joe came on and stopped at the door beside the pawnshop, then he took out a night-key and entered, but not until he had swept the immediate vicinity with a searching look.

All at once he opened the door and darted inside.

"Quick work!" ejaculated Branded Ben. "I know one of your new hiding-places, Joseph. I wonder if Olive shares it with you?" And the boy looked up at the lightless windows above the pawn store.

All was still again after the Octopus sport disappeared; his arrival was not announced by any light in the windows; the whole house continued as dark as before.

"I would like to know who keeps this shop, and whether the person manages the whole house," muttered Ben. "Joe Jolly is not likely to quit it for some time, and Major Bullion, the head of the Octopus, may appear. There's nothing here for me now, though there may be to-morrow." And the young ferret walked off with a final look at the Bowery sport's retreat.

Branded Ben had not gone ten yards ere the side door opened without noise, and a head with an enormous pair of ears was thrust out.

"I guess I'd better see to him!" hissed a voice as the eyes in the door sighted the boy's figure. "We can't afford to have any foxes on our trail just now."

The door was closed and the speaker stepped forward.

If he wore shoes they did not give any sound on the sidewalk, and as he approached Ben, he took from his bosom something very like a towel.

The next moment he went forward with his eyes on the boy detective, and with the cloth dangling from one of his lengthy hands.

The street was comparatively deserted at that point, and the stealthy person at Ben's heels was timing his movements so as to catch the boy in the shadow.

The keenest ears in Gotham could not have heard the approach of the villain.

He kept on at a respectful distance from the boy detective until the dark shade of a high building was reached.

Then he sprung forward and threw the cloth above his head. He was within three feet of Branded Ben.

Suddenly the hands that held the strangler's net darted forward, and the cloth dropped over the young ferret's head!

It was the quick work of a second.

"Great heavens! what is this?" cried Branded Ben as he was jerked back and almost thrown off his balance. "I am in the toils of the Octopus!"

His exclamation seemed to need no confirmation, for at that moment he was thrown to one side, and the mouth of an alley swallowed both Ben and his captor!

CHAPTER VIII.

A REPTILE IN KIDS.

LET us at this point, kind reader, leave the young Night Ferret, and go back to another important character of our story who demands attention.

Our reference is, of course, to Olive, the girl whom we saw inveigled into an adroit trap set for her by Joe Jolly, the Bowery dude.

Olive in the cab was at the villain's mercy, and when she fell back upon the seat with a damp handkerchief pressed against her face she knew nothing more.

Joe Jolly had planned his game with a good deal of shrewdness; he had inserted the deceptive advertisement for the express purpose of carrying out his scheme, and we have seen how it hoodwinked the young girl.

When the cab stopped, as it did soon after Olive's lapse into unconsciousness, Joe Jolly picked up the form of his victim and stepped out.

A row of houses of different sizes was before him and he carried Olive into one of them while the cab rattled away again.

The girl thus entrapped by the dude of the Octopus did not come to her true senses until the light of another day streamed in at the window near which she lay. Her head was racked with pain, and objects swam before her eyes for a few moments.

It did not take her long to recall some of the events of the past night, and she traced them with a good deal of distinctness up to the moment of her faint.

She was not in her own humble lodgings as she could see at a glance.

The furniture about her was new and strange and when she went to the window she found that the glass was painted on the inside, and that she could not obtain any view of the world beyond.

With a resolve not to inhabit the place, Olive went to the first door that met her gaze. It was unlocked, to her surprise, and she opened it to look into a room occupied by a woman who appeared to be asleep in an arm-chair.

"Where am I?" demanded the girl, as she walked forward and touched the woman's arm.

The woman who was large, almost a giantess and not very handsome looked into Olive's face and laughed.

"Where are you, my child? Why among friends?" she exclaimed.

"The manner in which I came here does not indicate this," cried Olive, flushing. "Will you let me go back to my little room?"

"Not to-day, my darling!" and thinking that Olive was about to start forward, the woman lifted her weight from the chair and caught her arm.

The girl tried to break from the grasp but it was firm, and she was obliged to desist.

Olive saw that she was no match for her Amazonian guard.

"You will see a friend when he comes," cried the woman.

"Joe Jolly?"

"Never mind. Wait and see!"

And the woman sunk back into the chair and looked at Olive in a half ferocious manner.

Five minutes had not elapsed and the girl was back in her room, when she heard voices, and the next moment Joe Jolly entered with his bland smile and triumphant look.

He came into the room twirling his hat on his gloved hand, and dropped into a chair, and crossed his legs after his usual manner.

Olive knew she had to deal with a cool, calculating rascal; a tiger with sharp nails under velvet paws, and she studied him some time before she spoke.

"Is the woman in yon room the one who wanted to see me?" she asked.

A smile appeared at once at Joe Jolly's mouth.

"What if she is not?" he inquired.

Olive's eyes at once flashed indignantly over the studied insult.

"Whether she is or not, I want nothing to do with her!" she exclaimed.

"Ah! you have formed a poor opinion of Mrs. Peebles!" ejaculated the Bowery dude. "But let me come down to some matter of fact, Olive. You may not pardon some of the events of last night, but I assure you that they were undertaken for your good."

"What! the decoy advertisement, the chloroform—"

Joe Jolly put up his hand.

"Really, you are very severe on me," he interrupted. "You will not let me proceed, I see."

"Go on," replied Olive, eying him closely.

"What ever became of your father?"

"You have asked me this question before," was the reply.

"Ah, so I have; and you told me—"

"That my father disappeared the first day we arrived in New York from England."

Joe Jolly bowed with a twinkle in his eye.

"I seem to recollect that," he remarked.

"Why didn't you write back to your relatives across the water?"

"Because the only living one, my grandfather, Thomas Coombs, abandoned my mother because she married against his will!" exclaimed the girl with a show of pride.

"I know that," smiled the Octopus dude.

"Where did you get the information?" exclaimed Olive, leaning forward.

"Never mind," and Joe Jolly gave his hat a new spin. "How would you like to be somebody? I mean, Olive, how would you like to exchange your present life for one more congenial?"

"I like my life very well."
"Oh, you want to bend over the machine day after day, eh?"
"It brings me bread, and is not all work."
"What if I should tell you that, by a single act, you could become one of the richest young women in Gotham?"

"That were impossible!" cried the girl.
"Oh, no; quite probable," was the quick response. "Look here, Olive," and Joe Jolly leaned forward, almost dropping his hat. "If you will become Mrs. Joseph Jolly you will be worth fifty thousand dollars in your own right."

Olive started and uttered a sharp cry.
"Maybe you don't believe it?" the sleek young rascal went on. "You've got papers concerning your birth, haven't you?"

Olive said "Yes" before she thought, and a moment after she spoke she wished she had left the word unsaid.

"I thought so. All you have to do is to produce those papers at a certain place; but you cannot do that until you have a husband."

The girl gave the villain a look that nonplused him.

"Let me explain more fully," he continued. "Your grandfather is dead, and has left you his sole heir under certain conditions. The main condition is that you find a suitable husband before you receive one shilling of the estate. Your grandfather was rather eccentric, but he had an eye single to your future welfare. He probably knew something about the annoyances to which a young girl with fifty thousand dollars would be subjected."

Olive heard the fellow through with a gathering smile at her lips.

"And you propose to place me in possession of my fortune by becoming my husband!" she asked, watching Mr. Jolly closely.

"There is no other way by which you can get it!"

"Then the fortune never touches my fingers!" exclaimed Olive, as she rose from her chair and drew her perfect figure up before the disconcerted scamp. "I will keep the proofs of my birth and of my mother's marriage. The fifty thousand dollars can go if you must come with them!"

Joe Jolly looked up at the girl, and did not know whether to smile or frown.

Olive was in terrible earnest; her bright eyes confirmed the language of her lips; she despised the reptile in the chair.

"All right! Go they shall!" ejaculated the Bowery sport in very ill humor. "The husband will come all the same."

"You?"

"Joseph Jolly!" laughed the fellow, till Olive started back with almost colorless cheeks.

"Don't you see, girl, that there's only one way out of this snare?" he went on, and at the same time he left the chair and came toward her with his gliding motion, which reminded Olive of a serpent. "Why, there's no power in New York that can prevent you from becoming Mrs. Jolly!"

A strange sensation of faintness stole over the girl, but she thought of her situation, and beat it off.

"I say that I will never become your wife!" she exclaimed. "May the vengeance of Heaven fall upon me if I ever stand with you before a priest. Villain, reptile, I loathe you! You are playing a deep game for my legacy if you have told the truth about it. Take it all and let me go!"

A laugh of derision was the reply Olive got, and when it ended, the Octopus dude put on his hat and walked toward the door.

"Am I to be kept here?" cried Olive, advancing. "Is this to become my prison until I put myself and my fortune into your hands?"

"Yes! I drop the mask at last, my girl!" was the reply, and Joe Jolly turned upon Olive with a look that almost chilled her. "I want the legacy that waits for you across the water, don't you see?" And he laughed satanically. "We are playing two games at once, but I am managing this one. Did you ever hear of the Octopus?"

"No. What is that?"

"It is a League that wins every play it makes. Once in its power, always there!"

"And you belong to it?"

"I have that honor," admitted Joe, with a mock bow that seemed to make his eyes glitter like a serpent's.

Olive stood before him like a person riveted to the floor.

His body was between her and the door, beyond which she could imagine her Amazonian guard in the chair.

"You can't get away!" assured the shrewd

rogue. "All the avenues of escape are closed. You might as well submit first as last. At some time very close at hand, you must become the wife of Joseph Jolly of the Octopus League!"

"Never!" cried Olive.

Another sardonic laugh, as the door opened and shut, and she was the sole occupant of the room.

The Octopus dude was gone.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LYNX'S REPORT.

WITH his feet upon a table in front of him, Major Bullion, of the Octopus League, was enjoying a cigar in a room of which he was the only occupant.

Beautiful rings of fragrant smoke chased one another toward the ceiling, and the major looked contented.

The room was expensively furnished and richly frescoed, as if its owner had plenty of money, and had nothing to do but to spend it as best suited his desires.

"Just as soon as the brand heals we'll be ready for the grand play!" suddenly ejaculated the chief. "Joseph is on the high road to success with the fifty-thousand-dollar scheme, and I guess the man with the manacle won't bother us any more. That little affair still puzzles the Mulberry street ferrets!" And the major laughed. "By Jupiter! it mystifies some other people, and I never knew he had an enemy besides ourselves! The Lynx did us some splendid work, for without him we could not have found Cephas Corson!"

As the man finished he turned to a box at his elbow for the purpose of taking a fresh cigar, when for the first time he discovered that he had a caller.

"Hello! When did you come in?" exclaimed the major, starting violently, though the person whom he addressed was a boy about seventeen.

"Awhile ago; that is, I came down-stairs, you know."

"But you did not knock."

"Yes, I did; but I guess you didn't hear me," was the reply.

"How is the mark getting on?"

"It must be healed. I don't feel it any more."

"Is it plain?"

"Very plain. I think it was a good job."

And the boy smiled, much to the major's apparent pleasure.

"I want to go out a little while to-night," resumed the boy.

"Into the street?" cried Major Bullion, almost dropping his cigar.

"Yes; but I will avoid everybody," was the quick response.

"You can't do that. Some of your old acquaintances will meet you and call you Ned Nolan, which might complicate matters in the future. You know you have lost that name; that you are to appear in court by-and-by as Lennox Lyons, heir to a tremendous estate. The brand settles your identity; no court can overlook it; and besides, we've got the papers that substantiate your claim. I don't want you on the street, Lennox."

The boy looked disappointed.

He was the same person whom Ben saw marked for life by the Octopus League, from the loft over Prince Mordecai's old shop.

The boy had lost some of his natural color by being cooped up, when he was used to the freedom of the streets, but he was still rather good-looking and had bright black eyes.

Major Bullion studied him for a moment, and then asked:

"Why do you want to go out?"

The boy dropped his eyes and blushed.

"I'd like to see Lona," he confessed, in low tones.

"A sweetheart, eh?"

Ned Nolan's color deepened.

"Where is Lona?"

"On Greenwich street."

"Your sister?"

"No."

"I thought so! Well, Lona won't go mad if you don't come for a few days. You'll go to her the best-known boy in New York if you wait a while. You will be able to buy her a palace, and to wed her in state, if you want to. Why, boy, ours is the coolest play for big stakes that ever took place in Gotham! We never fail, you understand—never!"

"Then I am to be shut up here till you want to use me, am I?"

"Yes; it won't be very long, but it will be for the best. Take several of these cigars up to

your room and enjoy them. We'll make things comfortable for you."

"How long will it be?" asked the boy with a dash of impatience.

"I can't just say, but a very few days. I am getting ready to announce that we have discovered Lennox Lyons, the lost heir of General Lyons who died in California a few years ago. I guess I have told you all you want to remember during the proceedings. You haven't forgotten any of it, Lennox?"

"I think not."

"Good! there can be no failure. Lona will greet you with more joy if you stay away awhile longer. Aha! let them beat the Octopus if they can!"

At the end of the man's sentence a bell jingled over his head, and he threw a quick look toward the League's victim.

"Quick! to your room, Lennox!" he exclaimed, and the next instant the boy disappeared.

In a little while the bell jingled again and shortly afterward the door opened to admit a person at sight of whom Major Bullion started.

It was the Lynx!

The ferret of the League came forward with a strange gleam in his eyes and stopped at the table and looked down into Major Bullion's up-turned face.

"Something has happened?" exclaimed the chief, catching the spy's countenance in an instant.

"Yes."

"Out with it! Have they discovered that—"

"No; the Mulberry street rats have discovered nothing," was the interruption.

"Good for that! I don't see what else can happen."

A smile came to the lips of Mr. Lynx and he leaned forward as he threw a quick glance around the room.

"There are two branded boys in New York!" he whispered.

Major Bullion almost left his chair. "Two branded heirs in Gotham? This is a thunder-bolt. I can't believe it! And at this stage of the game, too!"

The smile did not desert the Lynx's lips. He seemed to enjoy the major's consternation.

"Why don't you go on and tell me?" the chief exclaimed. "You've touched off the magazine; now, give me all the horrible details."

All the time in the hall without a boy was leaning over the bannister of the stair looking through the open transom at the two men in the room. His eyes were fairly ablaze with surprise, and his breath went out in short gasps while he listened.

It was Ned Nolan, the boy branded by the Octopus League, and while Major Bullion thought he was in a distant room and far beyond earshot, he was taking in the startling revelation.

"Well," began Mr. Lynx, "I was on duty on Canal street when Joe came back. He was followed by a boy whom I had met before, a boy who is a keen spy. When the ferret had followed Joe home I slipped out after him, and in less than no time I had a net over his head."

"Good!" and the major's face lit up with delight, but Mr. Lynx's eyes said: "You'd better wait till I get through."

"I tripped the young fellow in an admirable manner, and before he knew what had happened, I had him in an alley near the scene of capture," the spy went on. "In a little while I discovered that I had caught my physical match, for he wrenched the cloth or net off and broke from my grasp. In a flash I was at him again, for I knew the value of the prize I had, but he sprung away to be caught in the light of the lamp that hangs over Keno Karl's gin-shop in that alley."

"Aha! you caught him!" laughed the Octopus chief.

"It was for a moment only," was the reply.

"I seized him by the collar, when, strange to say, his next struggle tore his coat to the shoulder, and in the light of the lamp I saw the brand he wears!"

"What was it like?" exclaimed Major Bullion.

"It is the counterpart of the one you gave the boy the other night."

"On the right shoulder, too?"

"Yes."

"But go on! You held your prisoner?"

"He got away!"

The man in the chair seemed to collapse. He sunk back with a growl of deep disappointment, and his face seemed to lose every vestige of color.

"I thought your hands could hold anything!" he exclaimed.

"I didn't hold that young tiger!" the spy an-

swered, "but that is no reason why he should remain at large."

"Then you know him?" demanded the major.

"I think I do."

"In fortune's name, who is he?"

"Ben Folsom, or Branded Ben, as some call him."

"I never heard of him."

"Perhaps not," and Mr. Lynx showed his teeth in a grin. "We don't hear of everything, you know, major."

"You cannot be mistaken about the brand?" asked the Octopus chief, quickly.

"I cannot! I saw it on his white flesh as plainly as if it was on your cheek now. The sight almost floored me, for you know I thought—"

"We all thought so!" interrupted Major Bullion, laying his hand on the spy's arm. "You know what is to be done now. That boy must be run down! We've got our heir and there must be no other! More than a cool hundred thousand is at stake. Don't you see how that young city ferret could bother us if he only knew a thing or two?"

"But, as yet, he knows nothing," averred the Lynx.

"That is good. Now, sir, we must set a trap for him that will not fail to catch. He was after Joe, eh?"

"Yes. He and Olive are friends."

"So! I begin to see through it now. You need not tell Joe or the Baby about the branded boy. We will keep that secret, Mr. Lynx. Great Caesar! what a secret it is, too! If Ben Folsom should dream something, he might bust the biggest scheme the Octopus ever undertook."

"He'll never get to!" protested the spy. "I am going to show him that I never allow anybody to get the best of me more than once. I thought I had settled him with a box once before, but the next time—ah! the next time, major, I'll make your eyes sparkle!"

The chief of the Octopus caught a breath of relief.

"What about the other case?" he asked.

"That is safe!"

"The authorities have not discovered who killed Cephas Corson?"

"No."

"And what have you discovered about—"

The major paused on purpose to be interrupted.

"Absolutely nothing," was the reply. "There is one man whom the world seems to know nothing about. Let him go; they have buried him ere this. But what you want, major, is the branded shoulder."

"The Octopus must have it!" was the answer. "Pledge me that we shall!" and the man's hand crossed the table to seize that of the Lynx whose eyes glittered intensely as they met the chief's.

That was all the boy on the stairs saw and heard, for he moved away, his own eyes dilated with wonder.

CHAPTER X.

BRANDED BEN'S CATCH.

It was true, as the Lynx had told Major Bullion, that Branded Ben had escaped from his grasp after the successful netting near Joe Jolly's Canal street abode.

The young Night Ferret did not know, however, that the rent in his clothes had revealed the brand to the League's spy; indeed, he was not aware of the rent until he reached his quarters.

"That fellow is weasel and tiger combined!" ejaculated the boy as his thoughts went back to the struggle with the Lynx. "I must be on the alert if I circumvent him. Joe Jolly is snugly hid in his Canal street house, and the Mulberry street detectives would give a good deal to find him. But what do they want him for? Ferdinand Fox heard him testify at the inquest, and Joseph swore positively that the dead man was Cephas Corson. I might drop in upon Mr. Fox and see what is up."

A short time afterward the boy detective surprised a good-looking, gray-bearded man with a visit.

"Ah! the very fellow I was wishing for!" exclaimed the man who was Ferdinand Fox, one of the best of New York detectives. "You have heard of the last crime, eh?"

Branded Ben made no positive reply.

He did not want it to appear that he knew much, if anything about it; he wanted to see what the detective knew.

Ferdinand Fox went on and told the boy, who was known as a shrewd Night Ferret who had rendered the detectives considerable service

at different times, a good deal about the mutilated corpse found in the basement, and the inquest which followed.

Ben did not say that he had heard Joe Jolly's startling testimony, nor mention his struggle with the Lynx in the alley.

"I would like to find this Mr. Jolly," exclaimed the detective eagerly. "We have visited several of his haunts, but he keeps beyond our reach."

"Do you want to cross-question him?" asked the boy.

"More. I want to hint, not very politely either, that I think he deliberately lied."

"In what way?"

"He swore positively that the dead man was Cephas Corson, who went up for burglary some years ago."

"Yes."

"He could not be mistaken, for he was a witness at the trial when Corson was convicted."

Ben nodded.

"Now, I think I know that the body over which the inquest was held was not Cephas Corson's."

The boy detective started, but not in a manner that caught the man's eye.

He was eager to hear more.

"Who was the dead man?" he asked.

"We are not exactly certain who he was," was the reply. "But I am positive he was not Corson."

"Corson lived where the mutilated corpse was found?"

"Yes. And the girl who saw his last visitors swore that three men went down into the basement and that four came out. She was not asked to describe the four men minutely, but I have questioned her since the inquest. She has described them to me, and I believe one of them was 'the man with the manacle,' as Corson was known at the prison from which he escaped."

"But the dead man?" exclaimed Branded Ben with a smile. "You have him still on your hands?"

"Yes," laughed the detective, "and he is likely to remain there for some time. I want Joe Jolly, though. What do you know about his haunts?"

Branded Ben did not want the Octopus dude to fall into the clutches of the detectives—not for awhile, at least.

He wanted first to find Olive and to get at the bottom of the League's scheme which had branded Ned Nolan for a purpose of some kind.

Ben answered Ferdinand Fox in an evasive sort of way, telling him about the Bowery sport's well known haunts, and omitting the house to which he had just tracked him.

"We'll find him by and by," ejaculated the Mulberry street spotter. "I am going to make it a point to run Mr. Joe Jolly in. He had a motive in swearing as he did. That man wouldn't perjure himself for nothing."

Branded Ben was of the same opinion; Joe Jolly had a motive and a powerful one, too.

When the boy ferret walked from Ferdinand Fox's presence a new mystery thrilled him.

Was the detective's theory correct?

If Joe Jolly had perjured himself at the inquest who was the man found dead in the basement lately occupied by Cephas Corson?

"I am going to try my hand a little at this mystery," exclaimed the boy to himself as he went down the street, and he did not stop until he reached the empty basement where the man with the manacle had concealed himself for months.

He knew it had been visited by Ferdinand Fox and perhaps by other detectives, and he could not hope to find any new clew after the ground had been so well hunted over.

He shut the door carefully behind him and went to work.

There was nothing in the front room that claimed his attention; the scanty furniture which Cephas Corson had got along with still remained, for it was not worth taking away.

The back room where he had found the corpse was the one which he wanted to search.

A candle which he took from his pocket revealed enough of the apartment to start him off, and in a little while the boy ferret of Gotham was in his element.

"I wonder if Ferdinand Fox discovered that two men had struggled here?" ejaculated the boy as he ran the candle along the wall and saw the marks of boot-nails on it. "He is keen-eyed, and quick to imagine things. Two men had a contest here. I know that Cephas Corson wore shoes that showed no nails. Ah! I remember now that the dead man wore boots!"

The boy sprung up and seemed thrilled by his discovery. "Ferdinand Fox may be right

after all. Now for the felon's secret chest if I can find it."

The boy ferret went to one corner of the room and pried up a corner of a board with the point of his knife.

The next moment he dived one hand beneath it and began to feel in the darkness.

"This has been left, anyhow!" he ejaculated bringing to light a small box about six inches square, and locked in a mysterious manner. "Cephas Corson would never tell me what this box contains. He placed a high value on it, but it passes into my hands now."

Branded Ben put the board back in its place, and thrust the box beneath his coat.

"I can't pursue this search for my candle is out!" and as the wick dropped over on his hand he threw the stub of tallow away, and stood in the darkness.

"If Cephas Corson isn't dead I will find him; but the coroner has declared him dead, and Joe Jolly has sworn to it. I see the trail of the Octopus through the whole thing. It blurs like a trail of ink across a white sheet. I will go now and put the little box away till the time comes for it to be opened."

A moment later the boy detective would have been in the outer room of the basement if a certain noise had not assailed his ears.

Although he already stood in rayless gloom, he drew back and instinctively laid his hand on a weapon which he sometimes carried.

There was somebody in the outer room, somebody unseen between the boy and the sidewalk, and Branded Ben was puzzled to know who it was.

After awhile the door between the two rooms was almost noiselessly opened, and the presence of some one still unseen was felt by the young spotter.

Who was it?

Branded Ben felt like springing forward and grasping the person who he knew was directly in his front, but then he thought of the box he had taken from beneath the floor, and held back.

"I don't know as I can find much here," suddenly ejaculated a voice. "By Jupiter! I don't like the place. I guess I'll go back to the cab on the corner. It's too ghostly here for me, though I had some brilliant plans in my head when I came here. I had better go to Lona."

The voice was that of a young person, and Branded Ben thought he had heard it before—but where?

"I'll go away. Fudge! what did I come here for, anyhow? What if the police should pounce upon me, or one of the other people? I'm in the right place, from what I've heard 'em say; but I don't think the man who lived here was anything to me after all!"

A footstep told Ben that the speaker had moved back, and then he heard the door swing shut with a slight noise.

The next minute the boy ferret was in the outer room, and close on the track of the person who had just vanished up the steps leading to the sidewalk. When Ben reached the street the stranger was still in sight and moving toward the nearest corner.

"He'll find me at the cab about the time he gets there," ejaculated the young spotter, as he increased his gait and ran forward with the noiseless bounds of a stockinged prowler.

In a little while he saw a cab drawn up closely to the pavement, and the person he was pursuing was between him and the vehicle.

All at once the prey passed under the only gas lamp in the immediate neighborhood, and Branded Ben could hardly suppress a startling cry.

The next moment the visitor to the basement reached the vehicle and opened the door.

"You can go now to the place I have mentioned," he said to the driver as he sprung in.

Before he could shut the door the agile young city ferret was on the step, and the next moment he, too, was inside the cab.

There was an exclamation of amazement which Branded Ben checked by clutching a wrist which he found in the darkness.

"I know you, Ned Nolan, branded by the Octopus League," cried the boy detective. "I am not going to take you back to it. Don't say a word or raise a cry. You are going with me. Driver, to No. — Mulberry street."

"Who are you?" gasped a voice in the darkness of the cab as it moved off.

"Ben Folsom, sometimes called Branded Ben."

"Ha! branded, too!" was the ejaculation.

"Yes, and on the right shoulder, like your self."

"Great heavens! what does it mean?"

The boy detective laughed.
 "We'll get at the bottom of it all by and by," he exclaimed. "You have escaped from the Octopus League?"
 "I intended to go back. I wanted to see Lona," was the answer.
 "Well, you'll go with me for the present. I may need you."
 "Will you let me see your lion's mark?"
 "Yes."
 "Then, I will go," was the response. "You must be the person who slipped through the Lynx's fingers."
 "I am he!" laughed Ben.

CHAPTER XI.

GETTING AT IT.

THE ride to Branded Ben's lodgings was made in silence, and when the young ferret had dismissed the vehicle and conducted his prisoner into the house, he began the work before him.

"You won't keep me here long, will you?" asked Ned Nolan. "I am very anxious to see Lona, to tell her I am safe."

"Who is Lona?"
 "A young friend of mine who sews on Elizabeth street."

"She does not know that you are being used by Major Bullion and his pals?"
 "No."

Ned Nolan was a strong lad with a bright-looking face, and Branded Ben could not but admire him as he stood erect in the lamplight.

"What do you know about the plot?" asked the New York ferret.

"What plot?"
 "The one that forced the conspirators to mark you for life."

There was no reply.
 "Ah! I see you don't want to tell me much!" ejaculated Ben. "You want to help the Octopus League all you can. I guess you went into the scheme willingly, after all."

"I have been duped!" and then Ned Nolan's lips closed firmly and he threatened to preserve a stubborn silence.

"Well, there is another way to the truth," assured Branded Ben, decisively.

"Do you mean an arrest?" was the quick response.

The young ferret smiled and nodded.
 "My God! you don't want to drag me into the courts as being connected with Major Bullion and his friends?" exclaimed the League's tool.

"Why not? I've got to do something."
 The threat seemed to have its effect.

"What do you want to know?" asked young Nolan.

"You are a part of the game, I know," he went on. "Major Bullion has branded you in a manner which is expected to reap for him and his confederates a golden harvest. You were to lose the name of Ned Nolan, and were to become a person called—"

"Lennox Lyons."
 "Yes. What estate are they after?"

"The one left by General Lyons, late of California."

"Worth how much?"
 "Something over one hundred thousand dollars."

"What is the story? Go on."

"General Lyons had one son whose whereabouts were not known at the time of his death. He left all his property to that child provided he turned up within a certain time mentioned in the will. The main proofs of the child's identity are on his person. On his right shoulder is a singular brand, a description of which does not seem to be known to many persons. I believe it was left by the general to the California courts in a sealed envelope, though a partial description was appended to the will."

"How old would Lennox Lyons be if he were alive now?"

"About seventeen."

"Major Bullion told you all this? He coached you, eh?"

"Yes."

"He intends to prove by the brand which he placed on your shoulder that you are Lennox Lyons?"

"He does."

"What was to have been your share of the estate?"

"He promised to make me the richest boy in New York!"

"But he and his pals were to take the lion's share, of course."

"I fear so," smiled the false heir.
 "So much for that little scheme," cried Branded Ben. "You have been cooped up in

the League's headquarters for some time. What do you know about a girl called Olive?"

"I have heard her name mentioned. The young man spoke of her."

"Joe Jolly?"

"That is his name."

"She is not connected with the Lyons estate?"

"Oh, no; with quite another one."

The young Night Ferret started.

"When did Olive become an heiress?" he ejaculated.

"It was one of Joe Jolly's discoveries. The Lynx knows about it, too."

"Ah, the Lynx?" cried Ben, thinking of the cool and silent sleuth-hound who had entrapped him on the street. "You don't know where Olive is?"

"No, but Joe Jolly does."

"Of course," smiled Branded Ben. "Now what have you to say about the man who was killed by some one in the basement? Aha! you know something about that!"

Ned Nolan had started at the question, and his movement had not escaped the quick eyes of the young detective.

"One was found dead there, I believe," replied Ned.

"Found dead!—by whom?"

"By the men of the Octopus."

"Who was he?"

"They don't know."

The boy's answer seemed to confirm Ferdinand Fox's opinions about the crime of the basement.

"What do they say about Cephas Corson?"

"That is the man's name!" cried the League's victim.

"The man found dead in the basement?"

Ned Nolan hesitated like a person who does not know what to say, and Branded Ben eyed him attentively.

"Ah! you mean that you believe that the man called Cephas Corson by the coroner was someone else?" exclaimed the young spotter, and he crossed the space that lay between him and the marked boy.

"I want all you know," he went on, touching Ned Nolan's arm as he looked down into his face.

"The buried corpse is not Cephas Corson's."

"I—I think not," was the reply.

"Then Joe Jolly basely perjured himself?"

"I believe he did."

"Where is the tenant of the basement?—where is Cephas Corson?"

Ned Nolan shook his head.

"Do you mean you do not know?"

"Yes."

"But the League does?"

"It ought to. Major Bullion, Joe Jolly and Mr. Lynx went to the basement. Didn't the girl, Pinkie, swear that four men left the place?"

"She did; I heard her," exclaimed Branded Ben.

"You have used your ears to some advantage at the League's headquarters, I see," continued the boy ferret with a smile. "Do you still want to go back?"

"I stole out to see Lona. I can see her and get back to my room without being detected."

"Then you want to play this game out for Major Bullion and the Octopus?—you want to be called Lennox Lyons by the courts?"

"Not that, for it is a base scheme!" cried Ned Nolan. "I am not the real heir. Why, the sore on my shoulder is hardly healed; but those three men are terrible rascals. They will do anything."

A smile flitted over the boy detective's countenance.

"Now," he said, "I will show you my mark."

"I want to see it," was the answer, and the League's tool watched with a great deal of impatience while Branded Ben bared his shoulder for inspection.

All at once a startling cry rung from Ned Nolan's throat.

"Mine to a 't'!" he exclaimed, and then he sprung back and looked at the young spotter.

"Why, you must be Lennox Lyons!" he ejaculated.

"Well, I'm Branded Ben, and have been for years," was the reply, and then he took a step toward Ned Nolan.

"Did you ever hear Major Bullion speak about being in California at one time?"

"He told me a story the other night about an adventure in San Francisco."

"That's another link," remarked Ben to himself. "I'll get them all by and by!"

An examination of the two brands showed that they were exactly alike, only Ned Nolan's was fresh and not quite healed.

"You can go to Lona now if you want to," said the boy detective to his prisoner. "After that you can return to the clutches of the Octo-

pus; but remember, not a breath about this meeting!"

"Heavens! it would give me away!" was the quick response. "I can't afford to tell Major Bullion that I have been on the streets of New York to-night. Well, I am off for Lona now!"

And the youth started toward the door, glad that the cross-questioning had terminated.

"I may want you some time," suddenly said Ben, looking intently at him.

"In court?"

"Perhaps."

"But not while the Octopus League is free to strike!" answered Ned, with a shudder of fear.

"We'll attend to that. But go to Lona, then back to the League."

And the door opened, to shut on the figure of the young tool of the conspirators.

Shortly after his departure, Branded Ben went out and gave three signals at the foot of a door in an alley.

When it opened, as if by some interior contrivance, he glided in to find Prince Mordecai, the old Jew, at his bench, changing the symmetry of a stolen pin set with diamonds.

The old fellow at first eyed the boy with apparent distrust, but a faint smile came at last to his eyes and his countenance relaxed.

"I want to go up-stairs awhile," ejaculated Ben. "You need not show me. I can find the way."

And before Mordecai could speak, the boy detective was across the room.

A moment later Branded Ben had disappeared beyond a door, and then a figure stepped out from behind a curtained corner in Prince Mordecai's workshop and laid a hand on the old Jew's arm.

"Ho! you miserable old rascal! you've been playing a double game, eh?" hissed the man, who had a powerful frame and sparkling black eyes.

The Jew put on an expression of injured innocence, and drew back, but the man's hand clutched him like a vise and his eyes seemed to emit sparks of fire.

"That young rascal has gone to some work against us!" he went on, glancing fiercely toward the door through which Ben had disappeared.

"You know when anybody is at the second landing. Is he there yet?"

Prince Mordecai leaned over his work-bench a moment and shook his head.

"When he gets there you know what to do," continued the man, "use your ears. By Jupiter! you are on terms with that boy, who is the shrewdest police fox in New York. Ha! he is there now?"

"Yes."

"Then, quick!—the trap!"

Old Mordecai's leg moved suddenly under the bench, and a faint sound came from a distant part of the old house.

"Is that trap sure?" asked the man.

"Go up and see!" was the response.

"I'll take your word for it! Look here, old fellow! You must not play one card against the Octopus! If you do, Prince Mordecai will go out of existence like that!" And the man, Major Bullion, snapped his fingers in the old Jew's face.

CHAPTER XII.

INTO THE LION'S DEN.

MAJOR BULLION, of the Octopus League, did not go up-stairs to pry into the working of the diabolical trap Prince Mordecai had just sprung.

He resolved to take the old Jew's word for it that the throw had been successful.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed, pausing midway between the bench and the door. "When you look after him I want you to see whether he has a curious mark on his right shoulder. Will you do this?"

Old Mordecai nodded.

"Mind! don't forget this. It is important! When I come back you can report."

A moment later Prince Mordecai was the only occupant of the room and Major Bullion was out on the street.

"Py Shalob! I guess I done got rid o' der young chap at last!" ejaculated the Jew as he slipped from the stool and moved across the room. "I never feels vell when he's about, though he says he vill make me reech py an' py."

In a little while Prince Mordecai had disappeared and was climbing a narrow stair at the head of which was always set the trap he had sprung for the chief of the Octopus.

The old Jew's eyes burned like twin stars in his head and at the corners of his mouth lurked a venomous smile.

He reached the head of the stair which was quite gloomy, and as he put out his hand against the wall he touched something that made him draw back with a cry.

"So it is you, eh?" exclaimed the voice that saluted Mordecai. "Did you spring that infernal trap?" and some fingers wrapped themselves about the old fellow's wrist like the cold coil of a snake.

"Vat trap, mine poy?" ejaculated the Jew.

"Ah! no lies, mind you!" was the retort. "I have never trusted you beyond the length of your nose. Your eyes seemed to give you away the moment I saw you awhile ago. How many people have you sent headlong into the pit you threw open for me just now?"

Prince Mordecai seemed to have lost his tongue.

A cold sweat had come out on his forehead, and he leaned against the wall and gasped.

The trap had failed for once, and it was Branded Ben's hand that held him prisoner.

"Mine poy, there must be some mistake here," ejaculated Prince Mordecai.

"Oh, come!" cried the young spotter. "You can no more get out of your infamy than you can swim the Hudson! Didn't I feel the trap sink under me? You wanted to get rid of Branded Ben, did you?"

No answer.

"Well, you are not rid of him," the boy went on. "I am still on deck as you see, Prince Mordecai, and despite your cunning play I am liable to remain there. You can go back to your bench. No more traps, mind you," and Branded Ben leaned forward and spoke the words in the old Jew's face in a manner that made him recoil again.

Then he released the wrist he had held all along and Prince Mordecai seemed glad to get away.

If the young detective had suspected Major Bullion's presence in the house, he would not have let the Jew slip so easily.

In a short time Prince Mordecai was back in his shop, but his hands were not as steady as they had been, and while he tried to work he threw many furtive glances toward the door.

Branded Ben waited till he thought Prince Mordecai was again at his bench when he moved away and found the ladder that led to the loft of secrets.

Five minutes later he was lying along the board with his eye to the crack again, but the room beneath was only dimly lighted and unoccupied.

Branded Ben was somewhat disappointed, but he resolved to watch awhile, to see what an hour would bring forth.

The hour passed away and his vigil was unrewarded.

"The Octopus must be busy," he ejaculated. "There is no branding to do now, and Joe Jolly has to keep away from the secret police."

The young ferret crept back to the ladder and passed down-stairs.

He was very cautious now, for he had to be on the lookout for the old Jew's traps and cunning, for the game against the Octopus had reached its most important stage.

One accident to him, one success by the villainous league, would baffle him forever!

He stole into Prince Mordecai's workshop with the noiseless agility of a cat.

This time the familiar figure of the old Jew was not visible at the bench, and Branded Ben had to look twice before he could convince himself that the cunning old fellow was not there.

A close examination showed another surprise in store for the boy.

Not only was the Jew gone, but the tools of his trade had disappeared with him, his nippers, his jewelry implements, everything!

Prince Mordecai had taken flight.

"The old fellow was afraid to trust me!" laughed Branded Ben to himself. "The failure of his trap to catch its prey has alarmed him," and the young ferret walked to the door that opened into the alley.

When he tried to open it he found it locked, and no amount of work threatened to let him out.

"This is no prison for me, though Prince Mordecai may think so," ejaculated Ben, going back. "Once I left the old trap by the cellar when Mordecai had a visitor whom he didn't want to have me see, and I guess I can find the route."

The boy passed into a rear room, then down a flight of steps, which he found by opening a secret closet, and stood in the midst of intense gloom that reigned within four stone walls.

He groped his way to one corner of the cellar and began to remove some stones, which dis-

closed a rayless passage, into which he crept with some difficulty.

Once before he had tried this same passage, and it had led him to a grating in the alley through which he had reached the street.

There was something ludicrous in Branded Ben crawling like a rat through the narrow passage, eager to reach the street where he could stretch himself and breathe the free once more.

"Isn't this sewer never to end?" suddenly ejaculated the boy when he thought he had crawled far enough. "It hasn't lengthened since I tried it last. Ah! here I am out of it at last; but where is the grating? I cannot touch it."

The Night Ferret had reached the end of the narrow passage and was standing erect, but he could not feel anything above his head. Neither could he see the stars which he knew were glowing in the firmament.

In a little while Branded Ben discovered that he was in a place as large as the cellar which he had left under Prince Mordecai's house.

All was dark around him.

"By glory! this is a go, sure enough!" cried the young detective. "Can I have discovered a new secret way from old Mordecai's trap? I have known it for a house of secrets these many months, and some of them I have found out for myself. This is a new one if I am in a strange place and I seem to be nowhere else."

When the young spotter had explored his surroundings he found himself surrounded by the four walls of a cellar. They were strange walls, too, smooth and well cemented as far as could reach.

No steps seemed to lead from the place, but at last the boy in his search found a door-sill upon which he drew himself, and paused for breath.

He did not like the idea of crawling back through the narrow passage to Prince Mordecai's cellar and starting anew. He wanted to get out some other way.

Having found the sill of the door, he was not long finding a latch, and a moment afterward he had opened the door with the caution of one who knows his work.

Branded Ben by this action let himself into a small hall which he traversed by groping along the wall.

He could only hope that it would lead to escape.

When he reached another door he paused and listened.

He heard no sound.

"This house seems to be empty!" he ejaculated, and then he opened the second door.

The next instant Branded Ben stopped suddenly and gave utterance to a startling cry.

He had emerged from pitch darkness into light and he now confronted a man who was throwing the fierceness of a pair of tiger eyes into his face!

It was too late to retreat!

On the table at which the man stood rested a small box with lid open and papers scattered promiscuously over it.

But Ben hardly saw the box; he saw only the man, the last one he wanted to encounter there.

"My God! I thought the trap finished you!" suddenly exclaimed the man, his harsh voice sounding almost like the roar of a lion to the thunderstruck youth. "Well, if it hasn't, I will!" And the following second, with the last word still on his lips, the speaker came down upon Branded Ben like an avalanche!

The boy was against the door which he had shut, and before he could draw a weapon or lift a hand in self-defense, he was in the man's clutches.

"How many lives have you?" continued the captor, as he started toward the table with the boy ferret, who hardly touched the floor at all.

"You're the boy of all boys I want just now. Sit down—there! I want to look at you!" And he chuckled Ben into the chair and drew slightly back while his eyes seemed to get as fierce as a tiger's over an excellent capture.

As for the boy detective, he looked up into the man's face and put on a cool smile. He knew the person into whose hands some unlucky fate had led him; he had tracked him for weeks in and out of the dark and secret by-ways of New York, now under the gas-jets and now through the shadows.

He knew, too, that his mission and identity were known to this man.

It was a most unlucky, if not fatal affair for Branded Ben.

All at once the man darted at him with a laugh.

"They say you are branded!" he cried.

Major Bullion looked like a madman.

CHAPTER XIII.

OUT OF THE GAME.

"YES, I am branded. What of it?" cried the boy ferret, looking calmly into the city sport's face, dark with passion.

"On the shoulder?" ejaculated Major Bullion, eagerly.

"On the shoulder!"

The man seemed to gasp.

"Who branded you?" was the next question, and then before the boy could answer, the hand of the Octopus chief was upon his shoulder.

"You need not answer," continued Major Bullion. "I think I know," and he laughed in a way that seemed to give him great pleasure.

"Didn't you know you were walking into a lion's den when you opened yon door?"

Branded Ben said nothing.

"You're the fellow who got away from—"

"From your spy!" finished the boy ferret, as a triumphant smile came to his lips. "You call him the Lynx, I believe?"

"And a real lynx he is!" laughed Major Bullion, as if he felt sure of the boy he had unexpectedly entrapped. "He saw the mark on your shoulder. Did you know it?"

The young ferret started.

"No? Well, the Lynx saw the brand you carry," Major Bullion went on. "See here! Why were you watching the man who went into a certain house on Canal street?"

"Joe Jolly?"

"Yes, Joe Jolly as you call him," replied the Octopus chief with a grin. "Mr. Lynx says you were dogging Joe when he tried to rope you in."

"I have reasons for watching him."

"Oh, you have, eh? Has Joe Jolly ever crossed you?"

Despite his mental resolution to remain calm, Branded Ben's eyes got a new light at this question.

"Joe Jolly is playing a game I don't like!" he declared. "He is guilty of an infamous trick against a friend of mine!"

"Why, Joseph wouldn't harm a fly!" asserted Major Bullion. "You don't know that innocent youth, my boy!"

"I know him for an unmitigated villain in kids!" retorted Ben.

The Octopus chief stepped back and thrusting his thumbs into the arm-holes of his velvet waistcoat, put on air of hauteur that was ridiculous.

The lion was playing with the kid before proceeding to harshness, and Ben seemed to divine this after this display of poor wit.

"Well, if you don't like Joseph maybe you'd take a liking to me!" the man remarked, leaning forward.

There was no answer.

"Ho! you've shut your talk-trap, eh?" cried Major Bullion. "Very well, my young clam. You'll open it by-and-by, I'm thinking. I thought I'd like to see the brand on your shoulder, but I'm not particular about it just now. You seemed on familiar terms with Prince Mordecai to-night."

"I know the old Janus-faced Jew."

"And so do I—better than you do, I presume," assured the Octopus chief. "Sit still! I only want to get something at the table."

That "something" soon turned up before Branded Ben's startled vision in the form of a strong cord which Major Bullion took from a drawer in the table, and the next minute the boy detective was being fastened to the chair by the rough hands of the city knave.

"There's nothing like making sure of the game in the trap!" remarked the major as his eyes sparkled, and then they fell upon Ben's face turned toward the documents that littered the table.

"Did you ever see any of these papers before?" he asked.

Ben shook his head.

"Their contents might surprise you," continued the major, and then he went on with the tying process, which he did not relinquish until the young ferret was immovably fixed in his chair.

Ben's hands and feet were effectually tied, and a cord pressed against his throat made him keep his head hard against the back of the chair like a man in the garrote.

Having accomplished the tying to his satisfaction, the chief of the Octopus proceeded to gather up the papers which he put into the open box.

Ben could watch him at intervals, and he saw that Major Bullion handled the papers very carefully.

"I guess you can keep house awhile," soon

suggested the major, as he took the box under his arm and drew back with a malicious grin. "This building does not possess the pitfalls that grace Prince Mordecai's den, but it is a dangerous house for all that. You won't run away I'm thinking, and when I come back, if I ever do, I'll find you exactly where I'm leaving you!"

The emphasized words sent a nameless thrill through the young detective, and he watched Major Bullion without speaking until he withdrew, locking the door after him.

"If I ever come back, I'll find you here!"

These words rung in Branded Ben's ears long after the Octopus chief was gone.

He looked around upon the rather sumptuous furniture of the room, the lofty ceiling, and the jet that burned over his head.

After Major Bullion's departure a deep silence took possession of the room.

The boy detective sat bolt upright in the chair with the cord across his throat and a handkerchief gag in his mouth. He could breathe without great difficulty, but could not speak at all!

As for Major Bullion, he left the house entirely and soon appeared on the street, where he boarded a car and rode some distance.

After awhile he entered another house by means of a night-key, and turned the gas on in a handsome room.

"I wonder how my prize gets on!" he ejaculated setting the box down on the table and creeping up stairs.

Five minutes later he opened a door softly, and stole into a room where the gas was burning dimly.

On a bed against the wall lay a young person fast asleep or apparently so, and the next moment Major Bullion leaned forward and looked into the placid face of Ned Nolan, the League's victim.

He did not dream that the boy had been from the house that night, nor that he had fallen into the hands of the city ferret whom he had left tied in a chair in an old house.

The boy on the bed slept as if he had no excitement on his mind, and after a brief inspection, Major Bullion went down-stairs.

"Fate has played into the hands of fortune!" he cried, throwing himself into a chair in the room below. "The Lynx was right when he said there was another boy in Gotham who is branded on the shoulder. He has walked into our fingers and I left him where we can put our hands on him when we want him. Maybe if we had found him sooner—Pshaw! I won't think about that! He's got too much fire in him, and besides he looks too cunning for our purpose. The Octopus has the right key to the Lyons gold-mine. The boy asleep up-stairs is the one for us to win with."

Major Bullion might have continued indefinitely in this strain if a bell overhead had not tinkled, and a minute afterward the door opened to admit the Lynx.

"I beat you catching whales!" laughed Major Bullion at which the snaky eyes of his spy began to glitter.

"Who is caught now?"

"The boy who slipped through your fingers."

"The branded ferret?"

"Yes."

The Lynx looked as if victory had been snatched from his grasp; but he put on an indifferent air, and then became very serious.

"Why did you let Lennox go out to-night?" he asked.

Major Bullion started and let slip a startling cry.

"I did not."

"But he is out."

"Now?"

"He was awhile ago."

"Go up and look at him in bed!" laughed the Octopus. "He's been there all night."

"I say no!" exclaimed the Lynx. "I keep my eyes in my head and I use them when I am at work."

"And you say Lennox was out to-night?"

"I do!"

"By heavens! I can't believe this. I have just left him sleeping like a rock. He can't get out, I say."

The Lynx made no reply, but took a cigar from the box on the table. He was irritated, mad, and the Octopus chief saw it as he watched him through the smoke.

"Where did you see the boy?" he asked.

"On the street."

"Did you follow him?"

"Till I lost him."

The Lynx sent a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling and then cast the half-used cigar into a cuspidor at his feet.

"That isn't all," he said, coolly, leaning across

the table and looking into the major's face.

"The Mulberry street ferrets are onto it!"

"On to what?" cried the Octopus chief.

"Joe's lie at the inquest! It was very reckless swearing, but he thought he knew just what to do—the fool!"

"Who suspects?"

"Ferdinand Fox, the best man on the force."

The major seemed to lose color, and before he spoke again, he glanced at his watch and seemed to make a rapid calculation on the dial.

"I want Joe here," he exclaimed.

"He won't come. Ferdinand Fox is turning the city upside down for him."

"Where is he?"

"At the Canal street haunt."

"Oho! where his last catch is!" ejaculated the major.

The Lynx seemed to nod assent.

"If I am seen on the street going to Joe it might give him away. Does Ferdinand Fox suspect you?"

"No."

"Then you will take a message to Joe—straight to him, you see," and Major Bullion turned to the table and opened a drawer.

"I carry no written messages," said a voice whose sound made the Octopus chief lift his head.

The Lynx was calm, aggravatingly so.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Major Bullion.

"I'm out of the game!"

The pen dropped from the man's hand and his countenance blanched.

"Out of the game?" he echoed.

"Yes."

"We are almost at the end of it. It lacks but one more play and I can make that within forty-eight hours."

"Make it and rake in the golden shower," said the Lynx with a grin. "You'll excuse me, I hope."

"Not a bit of it! We can't spare you."

"Well, I'll have to dismiss myself," was the answer.

Major Bullion made a move as if about to leave his chair.

"I don't intend to peach, but I'm out of the game, I say," resumed the Lynx, backing toward the door, with his hand where the major knew nestled a revolver.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MAJOR'S "BIG ROPE."

DAYLIGHT was breaking over New York when a man opened a door that looked into a room where a gas-jet was burning.

The windows of this room had heavy shutters, and they were closed.

"Ha! the rat is here yet!" laughed the early visitor to himself, as his eyes rested upon a good-sized boy who was asleep in a chair near the table under the burning jet. "I told him he would be just where he is now when I came back, if I ever did, and I couldn't help dropping in to confirm my remark—to satisfy myself too."

As the reader can readily guess, the occupant of the chair was Branded Ben, and his caller Major Bullion of the Octopus League.

The young Night Ferret was still a prisoner, and the cords that had been adjusted by the eager and vengeful hands of the Octopus chief held him as securely after the long night as when they were first applied.

After he had feasted his brilliant eyes on the boy for a few minutes, Major Bullion stole away and left him there.

"It can be done at any time, or not done at all!" the rogue muttered with a dark but significant grin, as he went back to the street just beginning to receive its daily allotment of busy people. "I guess the game is entirely in our hands at last. To-night I'll confront Messrs. Pogue & Pandott with the startling information that I have found the lost general's heir. Jupiter! what a stir it will make! Nobody knows that I am the head of the Octopus. To honest New York, I am quite a different person than Major Bullion—I am. Ha! ha! About the time we rake in the general's fortune, Joseph will turn up as the husband of Olive, the fifty thousand dollar English heiress. Whew! what a big double game it is, anyhow!"

Major Bullion was not loth to dismiss the Lynx, when he was assured that the hungry-looking spy did not intend to expose the great scheme.

Mr. Lynx had helped the Octopus in various ways, and he had been paid in full for his services. He was shrewd and fearless, and the

major thought that his sudden withdrawal at the time was caused by the prospect of a better fee elsewhere.

During the day the Octopus chief did not venture near the place where Joe Jolly was in hiding.

On the present disappearance of the Bowery dude depended the final result, for if Ferdinand Fox, the Mulberry street spotter, should find Joe, he might force from him enough of the scheme against Cephas Corson to give away the whole plot.

The reader has not forgotten the spirited interview between Olive and Joe Jolly, the dude's unblushing effrontery, and the girl's resolve never to yield to the scheme he had in hand.

Olive had often thought that she might at some day receive a legacy from her grandfather, but she could hardly believe that the news had reached Joe Jolly and not her.

She had been infamously duped by the sleek villain, and the more she thought about the conspiracy against her the firmer became her resolve to hold out to the bitter end.

The strange disappearance of her father the first day of their arrival in New York had thrown a cloud over Olive's life. Her hard struggle for existence dated from that dark mystery.

She did not know that her father had been the victim of the Octopus League, that the oath of Major Bullion had sent him falsely to prison, and that after long confinement, he had escaped to become "the man with the manacle," and the tenant of the basement on the shaded street.

Olive did not see anything more of Joe Jolly after her interview until the day of Major Bullion's morning visit to his prisoner.

It was growing toward evening when the door of her room opened and the Octopus dude walked in.

The young girl was startled by the sudden appearance, and when she saw the same old smile at the corners of his mouth, she gave him a look of quiet contempt which he feigned not to see.

"Business is business, Olive," exclaimed Joe, dropping into a chair and crossing his legs in his usual manner. "Shall it be a husband and fifty thousand, or a quiet life here and not a penny?"

At first Olive thought not to reply to any of his insolence, but his manner of speech was too much for her resolution.

"You have been answered, sir," she exclaimed, "and I need not inform you that I have not changed my mind, nor altered my opinion of your infamy!"

"Ho, ho! that's still the song, eh?" ejaculated Joe Jolly, hursting into a laugh. "I don't want to repeat the last interview, especially the closing part. I just dropped in to say, my child, that I will be back at nine o'clock to-night and that I will not be alone."

He uttered the last words in a way that left no doubt as to their meaning, and before Olive could resent them, he turned on his heel and walked loftily from the room.

"At nine o'clock! That means the consummation of the scheme!" cried Olive when she found herself alone once more, and glad to rid of the dude's presence. "What has become of Ben? If he has missed me is he on the trail? Does he know that I have fallen into the clutches of the biggest knaves in New York? My room is at the villain's mercy, too! What if he finds the papers in the box in the wardrobe?—the papers that prove that I am a certain Englishman's grandchild!"

Olive did not know that the papers of which she spoke had already fallen into the hands of Joe Jolly by the Lynx's visit to her rooms, an event which we have witnessed.

The Octopus dude was leaving no stone unturned to win his game. He wanted to get his fingers on the legacy, and to put them there he was ready to stoop to anything.

A little later in the afternoon of his brief visit to Olive, a man well dressed and cleanly shaved walked into the office of Pogue & Pandott, lawyers, who did considerable business in hunting up heirs to estates.

The office was a very elaborate one on middle Broadway, and the visitor happened to arrive at an hour when the legal partners were sitting around with empty hands and ready for any client.

After the usual courtesies the caller rubbed his hands and smilingly remarked:

"I believe you gentlemen have the General Lyons estate on your list?"

"We have."

"And you are ready to guarantee the payment of the legacy, less your commission, of course, to the legal heir should he turn up?"

"Certainly."

"Well, gentlemen, I have the honor to state that I have found Lennox Lyons."

Pogue & Pandott started slightly and exchanged glances, then looked at the man to see if he was not joking.

A glance was enough; the man was in earnest.

"There is no doubt of my 'find,'" the caller went on. "I have been on the trail for some time. I was always satisfied that the heir was not dead, and my hunt has only proven that I was correct."

"What is your name?" asked Pandott.

"Theodore Wallace."

"Do you live in the city?"

"I am here now."

"Well, Mr. Wallace, your information is somewhat startling."

"I thought it would startle you," smiled Wallace.

"Where is your heir?"

"Where I can lay hands on him in a little while."

"You understand that a certain proof must be brought forward before the heir can be admitted to the rights that fall to General Lyons's son?"

"The proof is on his shoulder!"

"The brand, you mean?"

"The brand."

"You know, of course, that an exact description of that brand exists only in a sealed pocket which is in the hands of General Lyons's administrator."

Theodore Wallace bowed.

"I am willing to submit my boy to a thorough investigation," he said, with a smile. "I know him to be Lennox Lyons," he added positively.

"When can we see this person?" asked the two lawyers in a breath.

"To-day, if necessary," was the reply.

Attorney Pogue took out his watch and consulted it for a moment.

"Can you have him here at seven this evening? We are willing to break our rules and have a night session on an important case like this."

"I can have him here," was the reply. "Of course the interview will be private?"

"Certainly! At seven, then, we will expect you and the person whom you claim is Lennox Lyons."

"The person who is Lennox Lyons!" ejaculated Wallace. "I see, gentlemen, that you doubt my statements, but at seven o'clock all your doubts will be removed. The boy remembers enough of his father to convince any court, and then the mark on the shoulder—that is conclusive!"

Five minutes later Theodore Wallace bowed himself out of the office and went down stairs with an audible chuckle of satisfaction.

"I thought I'd open their eyes!" he exclaimed. "By Jupiter! they'll open 'em again when I appear on deck with the winning card. I haven't played this little game for nothing. They don't catch an old fox asleep, not when there's a golden henroost in the neighborhood!" and the man pushed down the street with a laugh on his lips.

Not long afterward this same man walked into Baby Bell's Bowery place and leaned over the counter and looked into the face of the proprietor.

There was a twinkle in his eyes.

"I'm going to pull the big rope at seven tonight!" he announced.

"How?"

"I'm going to show Lennox to Pogue & Pandott."

"Is the coast clear?"

"Clear as a shipless beach!"

"Where's the boy the Lynx has been after?"

"Safe and sound!" and then the man who was really Major Bullion in a new role told the Baby all about his unexpected capture of Ben, the ferret, in the old house.

The proprietor of the concert hall thought it an excellent catch, but suggested that the boy ought to be looked to a little.

"You may drop around there and look in," suggested the Octopus chief. "It's hardly worth while, though, for I tied him for a thousand years!"

"I'll drop in anyhow," replied the Baby.

At half-past six o'clock the burly figure of Baby Bell was seen to leave his place, and taking a car he set out for Ben's prison.

It was nearly seven when he reached the house, and letting himself in with a key which he carried he proceeded to the room on tip-toe.

"Of course he is here if the major tied him as he says he did," murmured Baby Bell as he opened the important door.

The next moment he stopped on the threshold with a cry.

The chair was before him, but empty!

CHAPTER XV.

THE FERRET'S CUNNING.

We will now go back to Branded Ben.

The long night in the silent room of the old house and the cruel cords had quite exhausted him, so that when Major Bullion looked in at daybreak he was in a deep sleep, and knew nothing of the visit of the Octopus chief.

Then, the dreary day came on and the boy ferret counted the minutes as they passed on leaden wings, each one seeming an hour of agony.

Would the day never end?

No one came near to break the silence by which he was surrounded. Although it was broad day in the busy streets the gas-jet still burned overhead.

Now and then the young spotter could catch the faint sounds of distant traffic, but the ropes held him to the chair.

His hunger became extreme, and thirst tortured him.

He realized Major Bullion's intention in all its horrible details.

He was to be left there to die a lingering death! That was to be the triumph of the infamous League!

Night came again, but Branded Ben knew it not, for the close shutters kept every particle of light out of the room.

He wondered if the house had no occasional tenants, nobody who might drop in and discover him in the fatal chair.

It was a terrible fate that stared the boy in the face.

All at once the long silence was broken by a sound that startled Ben, as much as a person in his position could be startled.

Somebody was fitting a key or a lockpicker in the door directly before him.

Branded Ben held his breath and waited.

After awhile the bolt shot back, and the door opened.

A face appeared first, and then the shoulders and figure of a man.

"A common thief! I know then all!" flashed across the boy's mind.

The next moment a slight ejaculation burst from the visitor's throat, and then he stood still on the threshold, his eyes staring at the boy in the chair.

The man had the look of a common house robber, but his eyes were keen and his figure lithe and agile.

He did not see at first that the young detective was tied in the chair, and when he did a look of mystery filled his eyes.

"Who be you?" he exclaimed, gliding across the floor to the boy. "What did they leave you here for?"

"For you to do me a service," was the answer. "I think I know you. Ain't you Bob Blodgett, the Bleecker street 'Norway'?"

The man started, and showed his teeth in a grin.

"May be I be," he said. "But who are you?"

"Ben Folsom."

"Oho! the boy who sometimes shadows for the cops, eh?"

"Very seldom. I generally work for myself."

The house-breaker drew back a pace and looked at the boy. Suddenly he darted forward and exclaimed:

"What's here?"

"In this old house?"

"Yes."

"A boy tied in a chair by one of the meanest rascals in New York."

"I see that. He's left his handkerchief, I see," and the 'Norway's' eyes dropped to the gag he had taken from the boy ferret's mouth, and then fell to examining it.

"I guess I'll cut you out!" cried the house-thief, and the next moment Ben's cords were cut and his limbs freed after the long captivity.

"I owe you a thousand thanks, Bob!" exclaimed Branded Ben.

"Which you'll pay by turning me over to the cops some time, eh?"

"Never!"

"Then we are quits!" exclaimed the 'Norway,' and again he repeated his question.

"What's here?"

"I'll leave you to find out, but nothing, I think," was the reply.

"Are you going to turn on the fellow that left you here?"

"Ain't I?" laughed Ben.

"Who might he be? Mebbe I know the rogue."

"Doesn't the handkerchief tell you anything?" "I find the letters 'T. W.' in one corner."

"Ah! Theodore Wallace—a name he uses sometimes when it serves his purpose! In certain circles he is known as Major Bullion."

"You don't say so!" ejaculated Bob Blodgett, his eyes dilating to their utmost. "Is this that rascal's house?"

"It is one of his retreats."

"Then I'll find nothing here. I thought I might make a raise by tapping this place, it always looked so quiet; but if Major Bullion sometimes occupies it, I'll find nothing. He keeps what he's got in another place."

"How did you come to know him?" asked Ben.

The Bleecker street rat laughed.

"It was rather a funny experience. I can't tell it all; but I was ratting a room once when two men came in. I ran under the bed, and heard them talking strange business over a table. Something about getting a boy whom they could work in some way so as to rake in big stakes. Then I saw Major Bullion for the first time, but his companion I already knew."

"Joe Jolly, eh?"

"It was Baby Bell, of the Bowery."

"One of the three!" ejaculated Branded Ben, and then he caught the "Norway's" arm and looked into his face.

"Will you tell this story at another place if I want you to?" he asked.

"Where's that?"

"In court."

"Great heavings! no," cried Bob Blodgett.

"I don't want to adorn a witness-stand with my classic countenance. They all know me, and I'd convulse the court by waltzing into the temple of justice. I believe I'll rat this house anyhow," and he threw a wistful look toward a closed door.

Two minutes later Branded Ben had left Bob Blodgett in full possession of the old house, and he was once more on the streets of New York.

It was almost seven o'clock, and Baby Bell was on his way to the house to discover the empty chair.

"In the first place, there's no telling what the rascals have not done while I have been cooped up in that infamous old trap," exclaimed the boy to himself. "I shall pay my respects to you, Major Bullion, at the first opportunity; and I'll make it arrive as soon as possible. I remember that, as Theodore Wallace, you used to be in California, where you were acquainted with General Lyons, whose heir is missing. What made you so anxious to know how I am marked? You can only succeed in your scheme through Pogue & Pandott, the Broadway attorneys, who have the Lyons case in hands. They may not be in the office now unless urgent business detains them; but I can drop around."

Ben forgot his hunger in his desire to fight the Octopus to a speedy finish, and his excuse for seeking the law firm was to post its partners about the major's deep rascality.

In a short time he turned into Broadway and jumped into a 'bus going up-town.

He was very eager now, and minutes were hours again.

At last the public vehicle reached a certain corner where the young ferret left it and glanced up at a large building.

"Luck is with me again!" he mused. "Somebody has detained the lawyers at their office."

In a little while Ben was at the entrance that led up to the office on the second floor. The stairway was quite dark, and the boy ferret was on the first steps when a familiar voice reached his ears from the door.

"Here we are! Now you don't want to make any mistake," ordered the voice, and the young ferret saw a man and a boy come into the hallway.

"I am just in time!" concluded Ben, drawing back to the dark sidewall as his heart throbbed.

"Wait for me here a minute," continued the voice that had thrilled him a moment before.

"The legal limbs up-stairs may like good cigars. I must not forget them!" and the speaker disappeared, leaving the boy alone in the hall.

Branded Ben knew that the nearest cigar store was some steps away, and when the man had disappeared he bounded down to the boy's side.

"Great heavens! you here?" cried the youth at sight of the young spotter.

"I'm nowhere else!" was the response. "The major is going to play the game, I see. He intends to present you as the lost Lennox Lyons, and convince Pogue & Pandott!"

"Yes."

"Your hat, then, and coat. Quick!"

The boy drew back.
"It must be done! I know the trick," cried Branded Ben, following him up. "If you refuse, I'll go up-stairs and pour out a story that will put you where you won't see Lona for a long time."

"I give in," was the response. "Besides, I don't like this lie I'm playing for those men. What is it you want?"

"Your hat and coat!"

Ned Nolan began to comply with the demand, and in a minute Ben had exchanged garments with the Octopus's victim.

"Now, let me play the heir up-stairs," smiled Ben. "You can go. I look like you somewhat in this rig, don't I? Come to my number early to-morrow morning. Remember! You play fair with me, or you'll see the cops and not Lona!"

"I'll not forget you!" and Ned Nolan bounded from the hallway and left the boy ferret waiting for the major.

He did not have to wait long.

Presently footsteps were heard near the entrance and the next second Branded Ben saw the well-known figure of Major Bullion at the door.

"Come along!" the Octopus chief cried to the supposed Ned Nolan. "We're a little behind time," and up-stairs he led the way never casting more than a casual glance at the boy at his heels.

Chuckling to himself over his startling ruse, Branded Ben followed the knave to the attorneys' door.

Major Bullion opened it and walked in.

"I guess I'm on time!" he ejaculated to the two men who occupied the sumptuous office and whose eyes were already fastened on the boy detective.

"Punctual to a minute, Mr. Wallace!" replied Pogue. "Have a chair. Ah! this is the boy you were talking about?"

"This is Lennox!" cried Major Bullion, turning upon Ben in the brilliant light of the elegant chandelier. "Lennox, these gentlemen are—"

Major Bullion stopped short and his eager expression of countenance changed to one of horror.

"My God! what does this mean?" he continued, recoiling from the victory-twinkling eyes of the boy spotter.

"What is the matter, Mr. Wallace?" asked the attorneys at the same moment.

The Octopus chief was speechless.

"It means that I'm not the boy he started with!" exclaimed Branded Ben, as his finger covered the scoundrel.

"That man is Major Bullion, the greatest villain in New York!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LEAP FOR LIBERTY.

THE bewilderment of the Octopus chief was complete, and the two lawyers could not suppress a smile.

Major Bullion could not for the life of him see where the startling transformation had taken place. He was only certain that Branded Ben and not Ned Nolan, his tool, stood before him!

"I guess a fellow doesn't have to die in a chair because you leave him there!" suddenly continued the boy with a laugh. "I remained just as long as I wanted to, major, but I am here now ready for business that may not suit you."

It was not until the young Night Ferret had finished that the villain found his breath again.

Putting on a bold, defiant look he strode forward and raised his hand as if about to dash himself against the boy detective.

"That boy is one of the street sneaks who always creeps at honest people's heels ready for dirty work!" he exclaimed. "Why, he is now up to some trickery to defeat the ends of justice. You can listen to him if you like, gentlemen. I do not want to hear his well-coined story, and so I will leave. In a few hours, however, I will return with the proof I spoke of awhile ago."

Branded Ben stood between Major Bullion and the door, and as the Octopus chief started forward, he slid back nimbly and turned the key in the lock.

Major Bullion's face at once became crimson.

"What do you mean, sir?" he cried clenching his hands. "Remember, boy; I want no bluff games by a midget like you!"

"Sit down, Mr. Wallace. Let us give the boy a chance," ordered one of the lawyers in a voice which did not sound very pleasant to the Octopus chief.

"He will lie! He has backers who have put

up a job on me!" growled the major as he reluctantly dropped into a chair and fixed his mad eyes on Ben.

"Now go on," continued the lawyer to Ben. "What is the charge you bring against this gentleman?"

Despite the tigerish glare of the rascal's eyes Ben took a step forward and smiled fearlessly in his face.

He did not begin at the beginning of his trial of the Octopus League, but he told enough to open his auditors' eyes and to make Major Bullion's look of vengeance descend to a stare of amazement.

"In heaven's name where did the young ferret get all this?" mentally cried the astonished rascal. "Why didn't Mr. Lynx find him out sooner? What was he doing all the time?" and then he returned to the boy who was unmasking the League in language that effectually blighted its prospects.

Every now and then the two lawyers would glance at the man whose villainy was being unearthed. His face was still crimson, and his hands seemed glued to the sides of the chair he occupied.

All at once a footstep was heard in the hall just beyond the door.

Major Bullion started and threw a look in that direction.

Who was it?

In a moment the door was tried by some one on the outside, and then a knock was heard.

One of the lawyers went forward.

"Is Mr. Wallace here?" asked a voice which Major Bullion instantly recognized.

Baby Bell was at the door!

The Octopus chief wanted to rush forward, but discretion and a glance from the lawyer seated near, held him back.

There was a smile on Ben's lip's; he, too, knew that the Baby was at the door.

"Mr. Wallace is here," answered the lawyer at the door. "Will you walk in?"

The next moment in came the burly proprietor of the Bowery den. His face was flushed; he was excited. He had come to announce to the major that the chair in the old house was no longer occupied.

The Baby at once caught sight of the major and sprang to his side; but, before he could deliver his message Ben's voice rung out.

"That is another member of the League! That man is Baby Bell!"

The concert hall keeper sprang back and wheeled upon the boy shadow.

"Jupiter!—You?" he exclaimed getting white, and then he threw a woebegone look toward the major, a look which said plainly:

"I guess the game is up!"

"I don't know that man!" suddenly cried Major Bullion covering the Baby with his finger. "He pretends to know me, I see. I demand to be let out. This is no police-station. Is this the way Messrs. Pogue & Pandott transact business? By Jove! gentlemen, I'll carry my heir before the courts at once. Good-night, gentlemen!"

There was a stare in the Baby's eyes, but it soon gave way for a look of indignation.

Major Bullion had denied him!

"That man knows me all the same!" declared Baby Bell. "What has the boy been saying?"

"I called him Major Bullion of the Octopus League."

"I guess the boy is right."

In an instant the Octopus chief wheeled upon the Bowery bruiser and then took a step toward him.

"Trying to fix things easy for yourself, eh?" he hissed. "I hate a traitor as I hate perdition! I'll make things hot for you as I go along!" and he stopped before the Baby, then threw a swift glance toward one of the front windows.

"I'll make a break for it!" he decided in that moment. "There may yet be another Octopus League! This one is on the road to Sing Sing from present appearances. Here goes!"

With a bound the desperate man was at the window and the next moment the sound of shattered glass was heard!

One of the lawyers opened a drawer to secure a revolver; but he did not touch the weapon in time, for, all at once the figure of Major Bullion disappeared with a triumphant laugh and the occupants of the office were left to stare at the shattered window.

"It was a leap for life, but it will not save him!" exclaimed Ben with a smile. "A man like Major Bullion can't escape long."

At that moment a man was darting down Broadway with gleaming eyes.

Fortune had favored the major in his desperate leap for life.

"I'll choke Ned Nolan black!" he exclaimed. "The young rascal has leagued himself with the boy spotter! If they think they have broken up the Octopus they will discover their mistake. Ha! ha! they did not look for the jump!"

Not long afterward Major Bullion darted into a hall alongside a pawnshop, and surprised a young man fashionably attired.

"A little ahead o' time, major, but, by Jove! I want a witness!" exclaimed the astonished person.

"What is up?"

"At nine o'clock the beautiful Miss Olive becomes Mrs. Joe Jolly, and—"

"We've got to make some kind of a strike. The hundred thousand is lost," was the interruption.

"What has lost it?" cried the Octopus dude.

"A boy—the real Lyons heir—has run us down. The Baby is in the hands of the cops ere this."

Joe Jolly dropped his cane and fell back with not a vestige of color in his face.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE END OF IT ALL.

BEHIND the bars of a police station, with a charge of conspiracy over his head, sat the well known proprietor of the Bowery concert hall, Baby Bell.

The man was thoroughly frightened, but he hoped that certain information which he had given to Branded Ben, the boy ferret, would get him out of the hands of the law.

The Baby was willing to do anything to ease his condition and brighten his prospects. He declared that he had gone into the Octopus League at the instigation of Major Bullion, which was probably true, but once in it he had been a zealous forwarder of its interests.

Ferdinand Fox, the detective, anxious to find Joe Jolly, heard soon of the Baby's arrest, and he was promptly on hand after information about the dude's retreat.

"I've given the boy all I know," said Baby Bell.

The detective bit his lip.

He did not like the idea of a boy beating him, but he did not say so.

"What do you know about the dead man found in the basement—the man Joe Jolly swore was Cephas Corson, the escaped felon?" asked Ferd Fox.

"You'll have to ask Branded Ben," was the answer.

The Mulberry street spotter went away discouraged.

Some time later, Joe Jolly, in lavender kids, walked into a room which was not very brilliantly lighted.

He was followed by a large man who had been lately shaved, and by a thin person dressed somewhat like a minister.

A large woman with black eyes and a handsome countenance awaited the three men in the room.

"I guess everything is ready," said Joe Jolly to this woman.

"It is not nine o'clock yet," was the reply.

"Oh, that makes no difference! Bring the bride in," and the Bowery sport threw a smile at his companions who looked very anxious and nervous.

The next moment the woman disappeared in an adjoining room, and startled a young girl who stood at one of the windows with its painted glass, which seemed to shut off the view without.

"Come!" she said, touching the girl's arm. "The gentlemen are here."

The person at the window turned with a cry and then breaking from the woman's clutch walked boldly into the trio's presence.

"Well, you have come?" she cried, looking into Joe Jolly's face, which colored under her gaze.

"Yes, Olive, the hour has arrived."

"Which of these gentlemen is the minister?"

Joe Jolly designated the thin man with a wave of his gloved hand.

"Oho! this one!" cried Olive, leaning forward. "How long has he been out of Sing Sing, pray?"

The thin man recoiled as if a ghost had appeared before him, and a smile came to Major Bullion's lips.

"This individual is a minister and a gentleman," cried the Octopus dude, flushing.

"And this one, too, I presume?" exclaimed the girl, turning upon Major Bullion. "Of course your friends are gentlemen, Mr. Jolly,

but I dare say they are very anxious to get hold of the legacy that awaits me. I have fully decided not to become a bride-to-night."

Joe Jolly's eyes got a look that meant mischief. The door at his back stood ajar.

"Shut the door!" he said, to the woman who kept the house for him. "There will be a bride in this house at the end of ten minutes. Prepare for the ceremony, Mr. Blanton. The young lady is only a little unwilling."

Olive sprung back almost to the door of the room she had occupied ever since her imprisonment.

"I will show you my friends!" she cried, to the trio, and then throwing a look into the room, she continued:

"This way, gentlemen!"

The next second two figures appeared in the doorway, and four revolvers covered the startled three in the parlor.

"The boy again!" ejaculated Major Bullion, recognizing one of the pair.

"Always on hand, major!" was the laughing reply. "Gentlemen, this house is in the hands of the Secret Police of New York."

"You have betrayed me!" hissed Joe Jolly, wheeling upon the housekeeper.

"They forced me to," was the answer.

"She tells the truth," continued Branded Ben. "Baby Bell gave your hiding-place away, Joe Jolly, and we arranged this surprise. You've been too busy over the expected wedding to notice everything, and if we have stolen a march on you, you ought not to complain at this late hour. The signal now, captain."

The man at the boy's side put a whistle to his lips and blew a shrill signal which brought the sound of footsteps into the room, and the next moment six stalwart police themselves.

Joe Jolly looked once at the formidable array and dropped into a chair.

Major Bullion threw a glance toward the window, but this time there was no chance for another leap to freedom.

All saw that the game was up, and that the boy ferret of New York had won his great play against the Octopus League!

As a matter of course, the members of the conspiracy had the mortification of finding themselves behind solid bars before morning.

The next day an examination was had at which the whole deep plot came out, and Ned Nolan, who had kept his promise with Branded Ben, showed his mark in court.

But that was not the only surprise.

There also appeared Cephas Corson, the man with the manacle and the League's former victim. He told how a strange man had sought to rob him, and how he had killed him in self-defense, to be seized himself by Major Bullion and his friends shortly afterward and carried away.

This story proved Joe Jolly a perjurer of the deepest dye, and fastened on him one of the blackest of crimes.

It was a proud day for Cephas Corson, Olive's long-missing father, when he heard the sentence that rid New York of the Octopus League, and when he could walk erect, a felon no longer.

For Joe Jolly confessed that the League's false oaths had sent him to prison for the Manhattan Bank robbery, when the League itself had committed the crime.

Prince Mordecai, the old Jew, was never heard of after his sudden flight, and the Lynx did not turn up to betray the Octopus.

It is probable that both are somewhere in Gotham to-day, earning a not very honest livelihood.

Branded Ben turned out to be the real heir of the California general, and Pogue & Pandott secured a handsome legacy for him.

He rewarded Bob Blodgett, the "Norway," for releasing him from the chair, and sent Ned Nolan a handsome present when he wedded his sweetheart, Lona.

After awhile Olive gave up her room for better quarters, for the English legacy was paid without dispute, and Joe Jolly lost what Ben Folsom gained—a pretty young wife, with a neat income.

It was justice all around at last, and with the boy ferret's victory, ended the dark deeds of the Octopus League of New York.

THE END.

Beadle's Half-Dime Library.

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- 61 Patent-Leather Joe; or, Old Rattlesnake, the Charmer.
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